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Startup spotlight: Natural Sins makes, sells healthy snacks from fruit, vegetables



PEDRO PORTAL / EL Nuevo Herald

HEALTHY SNACKS: Andres I. Domínguez Dillon displays bags of Natural Sins fruit chips. The company sells them to locations in Central America, the U.S., Canada and Japan.

Natural Sins

Headquarters: Miami and San José, Costa Rica

Concept: [Natural Sins](#) manufactures and sells healthy baked food products made from real fruit and vegetables.

Story: Co-founders Andres Domínguez Dillon and Ivan Sosa Lazarenko have been best friends since preschool and Sosa's mother developed a delicious crispy fruit and vegetable thin in her gourmet shop in Costa Rica. "This product was the star of the shop. When we saw the success we decided to industrialize the process and make this amazing product available to

everyone," said Domínguez.

Natural Sins launched in September 2011, and one month later, its Delicious Crispy Thins hit the shelves of Costa Rican supermarkets. The company is selling its products in the United States (Florida and Illinois), Canada (Toronto), Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama and Japan. You can also find its products in Natural Sins' online shop and on Amazon.

"We have the mission of changing how people think about snacking and fighting obesity," said Domínguez.

Management team: Domínguez, based in Miami, is an accountant with an MBA from Florida International University; Sosa, based in Costa Rica where manufacturing takes place, is an engineer with experience in the food industry.

No. of employees: Nine, between Costa Rica and South Florida.

Website: naturalsinsonline.com

Financing: \$250,000 so far, 40 percent from founders' life savings, 30 percent from friends and family and 30 percent from a bank loan. "We are working on preparing our company for capital raising," Domínguez said.

Recent milestones reached: Started working with two important U.S. distributors that will help grow sales and positioning in the U.S. market and in negotiation with others. Won first place (among nearly 1,000 entrants) and \$150,000 in cash and services at the [La Idea Business Pitch Competition](#), organized and promoted by the U.S. State Department, Acción, Univision and Venture Hive, among others. Selected as a beta tester for ConnectAmericas.com, a new online community in Latin America and the Caribbean developed by the Inter-Development Bank in partnership with Google, DHL, Visa and Alibaba.com that helps small and medium-size companies connect with suppliers, clients, investors and financing options worldwide.

Biggest startup challenge: Creating a product that was market ready and finding distribution partners. The [Hispanic Business Initiative Fund of Florida](#) secured funding to pay for marketing and trade studies that provided Dominguez with market knowledge and strategies for sustainable growth and has been helping with introductions to potential distributors, said Ismael Cifuentes, HBIF business consultant and one of Domínguez's mentors. "HBIF has been a true believer of Natural Sins' potential in Florida since 2012, and we hope to continue supporting Andres in this venture," Cifuentes said.

Next steps: Continue with strategy of positioning Natural Sins products in the U.S. market and becoming leaders in the healthy snacking industry. Raise capital to invest in U.S. marketing strategy and bring new talent to the team.

Strategy for next steps: Domínguez has been working with the [Florida Small Business Development Center at FIU](#) on business strategy and establishing clear execution priorities. "I am helping Andres focus his efforts and limited resources on prioritizing packaging design on the one hand and on initially focusing sales efforts to Chicago and Florida so that he can better control the marketing and sales efforts, experiment with some marketing tactics, and develop a proven proof of concept that he can shop to raise the necessary funding for a broader rollout of his product," said Ricardo Weisz, an international business expert and mentor for the SBDC. "We are also working on financial planning, strengthening of the management team, and establishing strategies for raising funds."

Nancy Dahlberg

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