



The Three T's of MARK MANGUERA

(Twittering, Tacos and Trucks)

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FilAm Mark Manguera is the Taco King. The 30-year-old entrepreneur has not only revolutionized the way we see taco, but also how to market it. He is the part owner and founder of Kogi BBQ truck, a mobile Korean-Mexican fusion taco vendor in Los Angeles.

The business, which consists of two taco trucks circling LA, has only been around since November but its impact is already being felt worldwide because of the creative marketing scheme.

"Kogi BBQ started as a taco truck and all of the success hasn't been our intentions," said Chef Roy Choi, Manguera's partner in this endeavor. "It started out as a hobby to go back to the craft of cooking and everything from that really developed from Twitter and the web. The food is hopefully good enough but really it was the web where people started to connect and we started to communicate with the people."

Viral marketing, a term used by advertisers uses social networking sites to increase brand awareness, has led to the success of Kogi BBQ.

You won't be able to find the Korean Kogi taco truck sitting in a place day-in-and-day-out. The only way you'll know where Kogi is if you're one of the 24,000 plus people who follow the truck on Twitter, a social networking site that allows users to stay connected in real time.

Everyday twitter followers will receive an update on where the truck will be that night. For example, on Wednesday May 19 Kogi's twitter account reads: VERDE: 6pm-9pm@UCLA - Gayely & Strathmore; 10pm-2am@The Brig - Abbot Kinney and Palm in Venice.

Alice Shin, Kogi's twitter writer and blogger, said that it's like a modern day treasure hunt. People check their twitter account everyday to see where the Korean BBQ taco truck is parked that night.

And the results have been outstanding, according to Choi.

Kogi averages nearly 600 to 700 people a night and go through 500 pounds of meat a day, said Choi.

It's the reason why Kogi BBQ taco truck has been featured on mainstream news outlets like *Newsweek*, *New York Times*, *CNET*, *Associated Press*, and food bloggers have been raving about the product.

"[Starting out] we had no idea that we'd be here today," said Manguera to the *Asian Journal*. "We had no idea that we would be in the press that you've seen out there. I can't believe it. Here we are hitting national press, international press, national news off of a taco truck."

Erik Bratt, a former business journalist, now President of Engage Social Media, who authored a report informal survey that shows Twitter's gaining acceptance as an important social media business tool, said that Kogi BBQ is one of 11 recent case studies that prove how effective twitter and other social networking sites are to a business.

"These 11 case studies provide a quick, yet detailed, look at how businesses are using Twitter today to drive tangible results," said Bratt.

Korean Tacos

Manguera and the rest of the Kogi team's unique marketing campaign is not the only reason why Kogi has been a success.

It's the food of course.

The food is what really drives people to come back time and time again and to check their Twitter accounts daily.

Manguera thought of the concept of placing traditional Korean flavors on a taco after a night of partying last year.

Many people consider Los Angeles as the birthplace of taco trucks. However because of its large Latin population most of those taco trucks offer only traditional Mexican flavors – *carne asada*, *lengua*, and pork tacos, *burritos*, and *quesadillas*.

Hungry, drunk and with little money in his pockets, Manguera, who recalls was with his wife and sister-in-law, went to the nearest taco truck.

He came back home and took one bite of his taco then had a thought: What if they placed Korean BBQ on a taco?

Maybe it was the alcohol talking.

He shared his drunken moment of revelation with the rest of the family, he said, 'Alice (his sister-in-law), wouldn't it be great if someone put Korean barbecue on a taco, sold it from a truck at 2am and parked the truck in front of a club?'

"Sure, Mark," she giggled.

But the thought wouldn't leave Manguera's head.

"Wouldn't it be a great idea if someone put Korean barbecue on a taco and sold it from a truck to all the late night partygoers?" He again thought about it.

"They thought I was nuts," said Manguera, who's married into a Korean family. "They were telling me I was crazy and to just keep eating and drinking."

He awoke the next morning convinced that he could make the idea work. He called a friend, Choi, who was working as a chef at the Beverly Hilton Hotel, about his idea.



Chef Roy Choi in the kitchen

"He said I was crazy too," recalls Manguera. "But the more he thought about it, the more he believed it was a good idea."

It only took about three weeks for Manguera to start the business.

Leap of Faith

"One of the most controlling factors in life in my mind, and the experiences I have been through is fear," said Manguera. "If you let fear take over you...if you let complacency take over you and your life, in ten years from now I would look back and wish I did something with my life. It takes a little bit of courage, a little bit of hope and a team of people to get you over that hump."

It takes a tremendous amount of guts and fortitude to give up a posh job to start a taco truck company.

This is exactly what Manguera did and his sacrifice has led to one of the greatest food innovations of perhaps all time.

Manguera said he was compelled to act on his instinct on putting Korean BBQ on a taco because he wanted to do something he felt was right.

Born in Manila, Philippines, Manguera arrived to the US when he was three years old.

He grew up in Vallejo before moving to Anaheim to attend California State University, Fullerton.

He received a bachelor in Business Management at CSUF before continuing to pursue his education at the California Culinary Institute. After working briefly as a chef in Hawaii, he went to the mainland and served as a food and beverage director in a downtown hotel.

During that time he met his future wife, Caroline, a Korean-American. He said ever since he met her, he's been entrenched in Korean culture.

Manguera had a posh job as a food and beverage director at a five star hotel in Downtown Los Angeles. However, he felt like there was something missing. He wanted more out of life.

Manguera recalled a conversation with a mentor, who was quite older than him. The mentor said, "Mark, do you recall what you did ten years ago?"

"Yes," said Mark, "I remember graduating from high school, going to grad night, entering the first year of college."

The mentor said, "doesn't it feel like that just happened yesterday?"

"Yah, it was great times," responded Manguera.

Then the mentor dropped the hammer on his young prodigy.

"Imagine ten years from now when you're 37, 38 or 40 years old. What do you see yourself doing in ten years?"

Manguera was dumbfounded. He was unsure of what to do with his life but after a while it hit him.

"Am I going to keep working at a five star hotel everyday? Am I happy with a cushy salary? Am I happy with my 401k? I have a wife now. Are we happy? Or do I take a leap of faith?"

His leap of faith led to the founding of Kogi BBQ.

He advises those that are questioning themselves about their life to figure out their core concept before taking that leap of faith.

"Once I had all of them, Roy, Alice, Caroline who were a lot better than me -- then I said I'm ready to go."

Now, Manguera challenges people and asks that the fundamental questions: "Do you remember what you did ten years ago? What do you see yourself doing in ten years?" [AJ](#)

Publisher's Note

Pinoy Ingenuity

The concept of food cars or meals-on-wheels is not new for Filipinos, especially in the Philippines. Fish and squid balls, bananacue, isaw and other kinds of street food are common merienda fare. But for someone to actually create a mania through viral marketing, fusing Korean and Mexican tastes in one taco and selling it through mobile means is PURE, INGENIOUS INNOVATION. The Asian Journal MDWK Magazine brings you Mark Manguera's engaging and truly original tale in this week's issue -- a revolutionary act that showcases inherent Pinoy traits -- that of creativity, ingenuity and of course, an ardent love for food. [AJ](#)