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# Craft Beverage Startup Ekos Raises \$8M Series A Round

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Ekos' leadership team: Greg Forehand (R) and Josh McKinney (R). Courtesy photo.

By Courtney Gabrielson

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Charlotte is gaining notoriety for its craft brewery scene. And now, a local startup's software, which caters to breweries, wineries, cideries (and more) is making headlines.

Today, [Ekos](#) (as in "ecosystem") announced it has closed an \$8 million Series A round. Atlanta-based venture capital firm, [Noro-Moseley Partners](#), led the round; its general partner, Alan Taetle, and principal, John Ale, will join the company's board of directors.

"We're truly excited about our Series A, because it means that Ekos will continue to evolve and become a company that will help all artisanal makers," said Ekos CEO Josh McKinney in a [statement](#). "However, our first love is the craft beer market, and we remain steadfastly committed to those customers and continuing to help them be efficient and profitable."

This represents the first funding round for Ekos, which was bootstrapped since its 2014 inception, McKinney told Charlotte Inno.

"We ended 2014 with around 100 costumers using the platform."

The company was born out of McKinney's professional experience working with software of all stripes — and his love for craft beer. Hanging around breweries and the folks that ran them, in turn, clued him into the fact that these entities didn't have a wholesale tool that made marketing, inventory, sales and other elements of their day-to-day work easy and straightforward.

Solving that problem became something that captivated McKinney.

"I was tired of just thinking about it all the time," he said. Eventually, he convinced himself to get working. "Let's try this. If it works out, great. If it doesn't, I can move on with my life."

As McKinney went from brewery to local brewery to pick brains and share his idea, it became clear that he wasn't the only one cooking up a software like he had in mind. Greg Forehand, Ekos' now-CTO, had been working on a similar product of his own. It wasn't long before the two met, discussed their plans and ultimately decided to join forces. McKinney would handle elements like sales; Forehand would oversee development.

Later that year, the Ekos team sent out a press release announcing their tool, which is a soup-to-nuts, highly customizable management software that includes an onboarding implementation process for new customers. It was (and is) priced in relation to the size of its clients' enterprise, starting at \$179 a month.

The announcement ... resonated, to say the least.

"We got bombarded," McKinney said. "We ended 2014 with around 100 costumers using the platform."

In the five years since its debut, Ekos has been able to expand its focus from software serving craft breweries to tools for those running wineries, brewing cider and selling other food and beverages; there's separate platforms for each vertical, with more on the way.



They even have an international presence, which McKinney said also snowballed organically. Brewers abroad called Ekos for help, and it updated its offerings with units and tools to match the country's regulations.

The move was a pleasant surprise, and one that will continue to mature thanks to its funding round.

"International has not been our focus in expansion," McKinney said. "We'll be able to build more tools for our international customers."

The global hype for Ekos is reflected in its numbers. It serves breweries in every state and in over 40 countries. It just hit the 1,700 customer milestone. And its team has gone from three people to 32 local employees, with plans to double its staff in the near future.

Those aren't the only things on the docket for Ekos. Leadership wants to expand in the food and beverage markets, McKinney said, and a desire to grow an even larger presence in the alcoholic beverage industry (a product focused on spirits is in the works for next year). Adding an additional integration, one that allows customers to have a greater online presence (as well as sort of a digital central hub for building brewery community), is also on the list.

In essence, the goal for the Ekos team is to continue to serve their customers well, a mission that's been in the company's DNA from the start.

"We had a good five and half years of learning, and that has allowed us to really focus on our customers," McKinney said. "We've been able to develop the product our customers need. ... The goal has never been to get investment for us, but to build the best product that we can and help as many people as we can."

In turn, the Charlotte community has been a pillar for the company, as well as its burgeoning beer scene.



You guessed it: Ekos helping this brewery get stuff DONE. Courtesy photo.

"We started building this ... at the perfect time as far as the upswing," McKinney said.

As Charlotte's breweries continued to mature (as well as the local startup ecosystem), so did Ekos. It was semi-symbiotic dance that allowed each side to learn from each other, provide insight and scale.

"Charlotte's been great from a collaboration and resource standpoint," McKinney added. "Back in the day, everyone said, 'Oh, Charlotte's a banking town.' Now that's changing. ... Startups are doing a big thing."

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