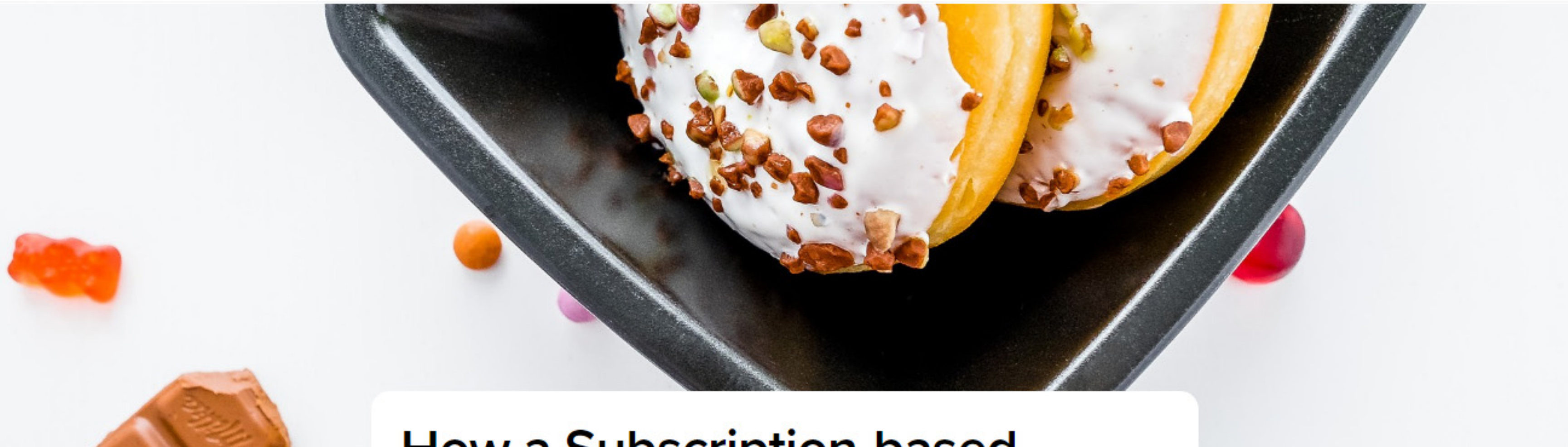
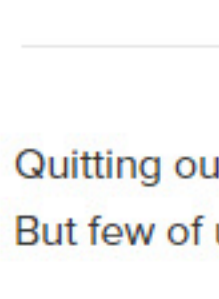




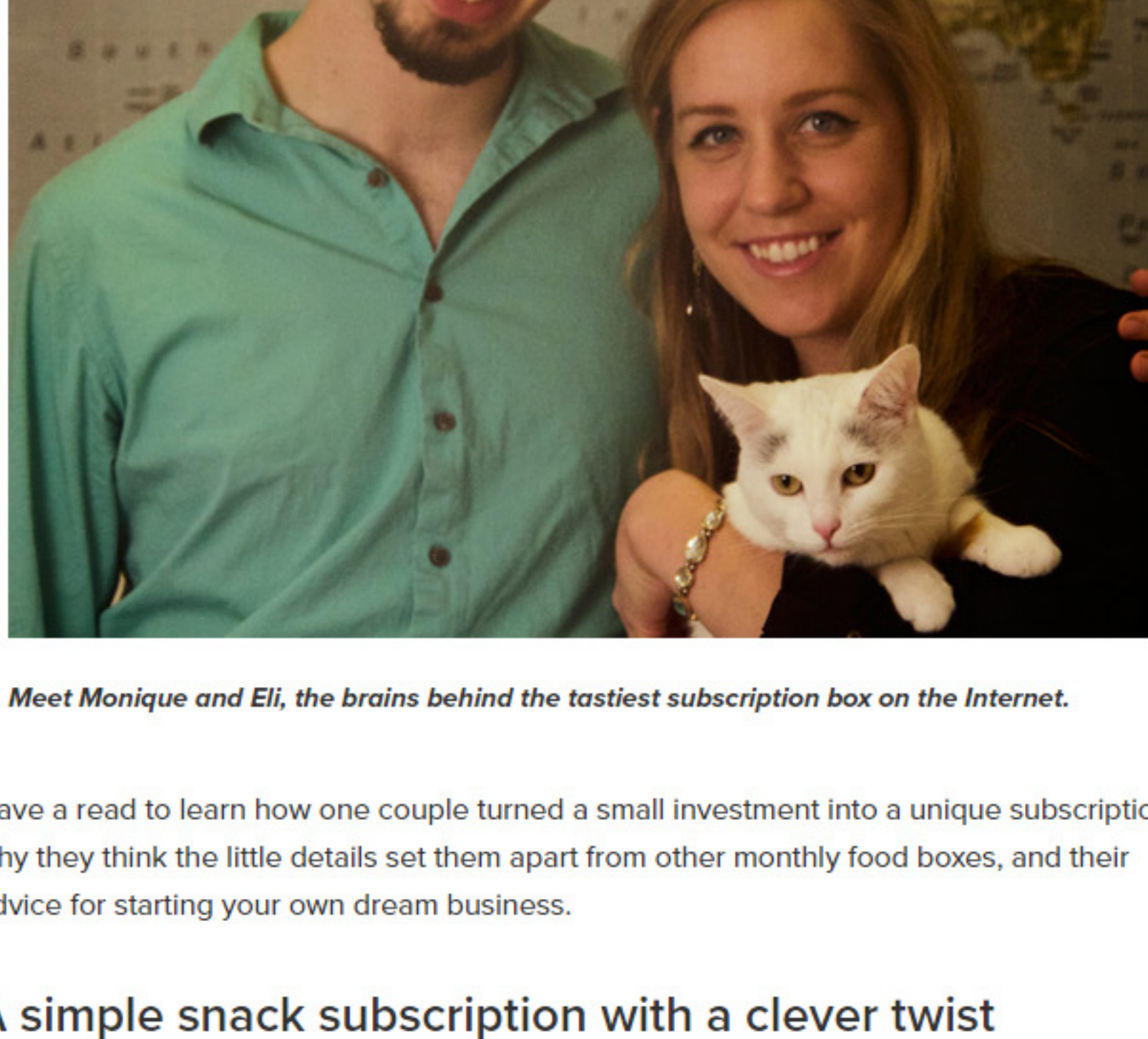
How a Subscription-based Snack Business became an Overnight Success



CUSTOMER STORIES WRITTEN BY NICOLE KOHLER

Quitting our day jobs to start our own business is something many people dream of doing. But few of us have the courage, much less the tenacity and staying power to pull it off.

Then there are the ones who refuse to let their dream die. Meet Monique Bernstein and Eli Zauner, the co-owners of [Universal Yums](#). Launched in October 2014, [this subscription snack company](#) has gone through a few ups and downs, but has ultimately endured to become a smash hit with foodies — and, surprisingly, redditors!



Meet Monique and Eli, the brains behind the tastiest subscription box on the Internet.

Have a read to learn how one couple turned a small investment into a unique subscription, why they think the little details set them apart from other monthly food boxes, and their advice for starting your own dream business.

A simple snack subscription with a clever twist

Universal Yums bills itself as a company offering “snacks from a different country delivered monthly.” Monthly subscription boxes of snacks may be nothing new, but the difference here is that each month, [the box is themed with snacks from a different country](#).

For example, some of the [past boxes](#) have been stuffed to the brim with hand-picked chips, cookies, and chocolates from Italy, Thailand, Germany, Japan, and France. According to Monique, more than 20 boxes have been sent so far. On the subject of revisits to countries she says:

We will eventually have to repeat some countries. When we do this we'll look for different products, so that even though the country is the same, the products [will be] new.



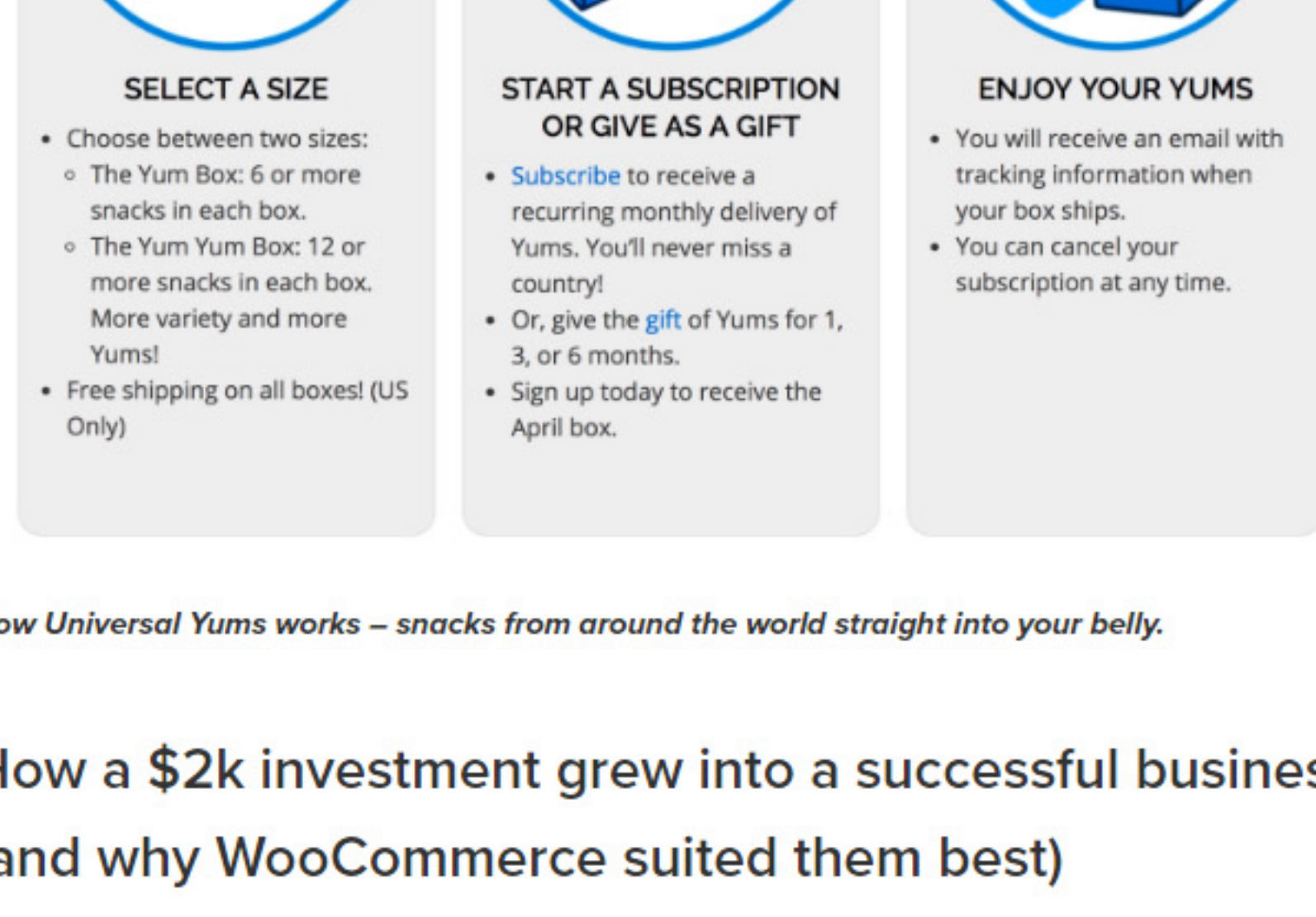
Snacks from a different country delivered monthly.

Universal Yums in a nutshell. Or perhaps, more accurately, in a box. A very tasty box.

To find snacks for their subscription boxes, Monique and Eli go through trusted sources they've made over the years. Once they've acquired samples, they and their employees [taste-test each product](#) to determine if it's a good fit for a themed box. They can't ensure they'll satisfy everyone's taste but they can determine amongst themselves if it's a good representation of that country's flavors and style.

Taste-tested and team-approved snacks are rolled into a monthly subscription box available in two sizes (minimum of six or twelve snacks) accompanied by an informative booklet Monique puts together. And then it's off to their subscribers for their eating enjoyment.

HOW IT WORKS

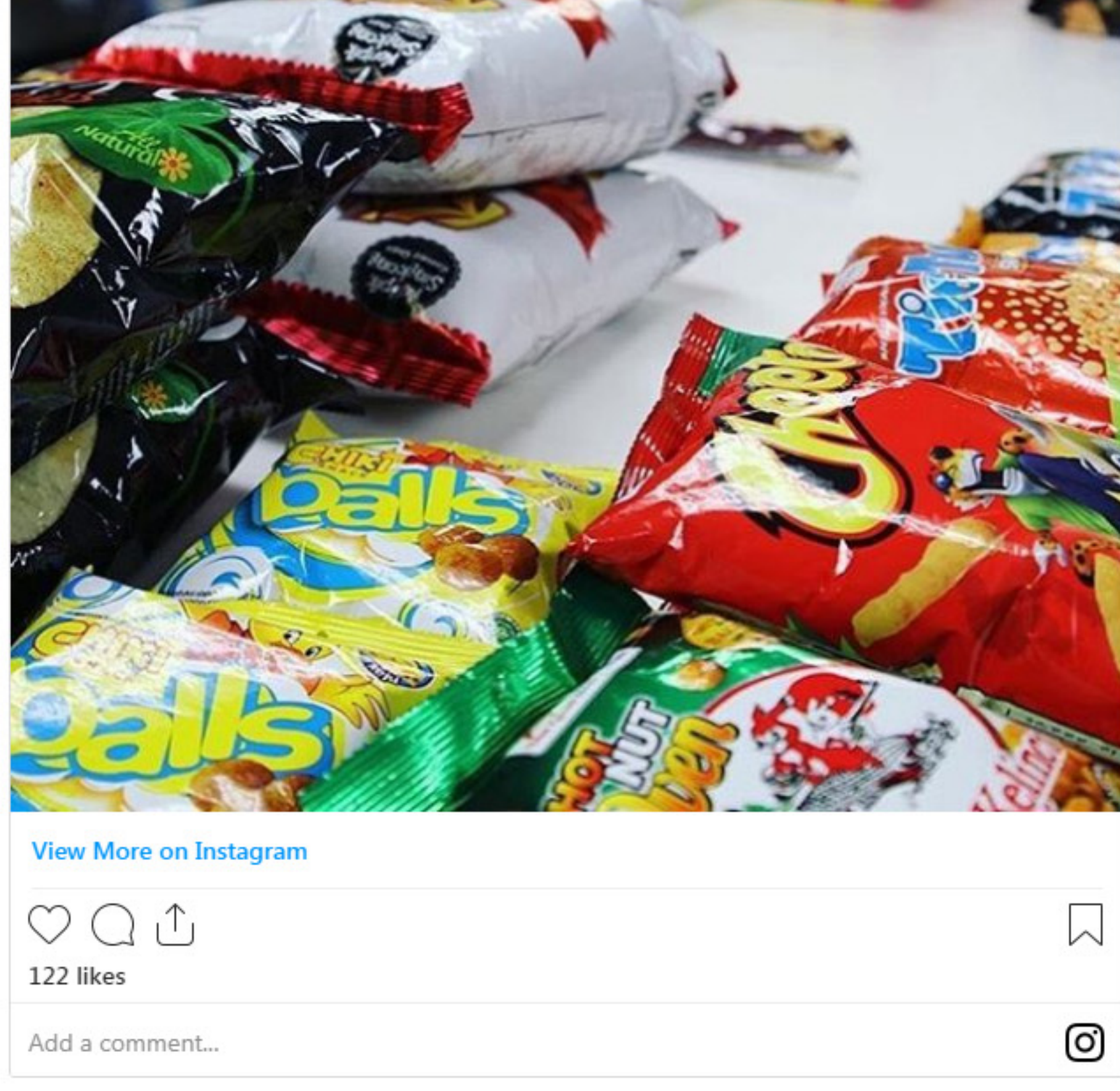


How Universal Yums works – snacks from around the world straight into your belly.

How a \$2k investment grew into a successful business (and why WooCommerce suited them best)

We asked the owners how they came up with the idea of Universal Yums, and it was Monique who developed the initial concept. In June of 2014 she wrote a list of ten business ideas on her lunch hour at work, and both she and Eli liked one of those ideas — for a global snack subscription box — so much that [they started on it that same night after dinner](#).

Each of them invested \$1,000 from their savings accounts into starting the business, which went toward the website, hosting, initial inventory, and a special stamp for branding their shipping boxes. They “basically had no overhead to start,” says Monique.



When initially researching platforms for the website, Eli said he spent quite a long time looking for something that had the recurring billing features and front-end control he wanted. Eventually he came across WooCommerce, and the rest is history:

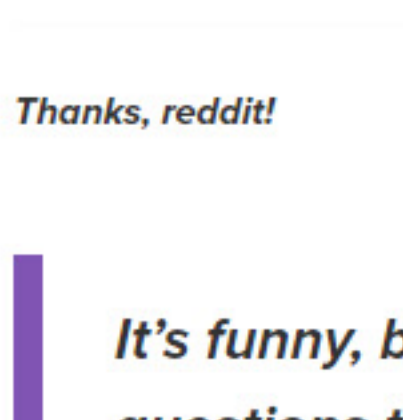
I settled on WooCommerce because [WooCommerce Subscriptions](#) had a ton of great features for an extremely affordable price, and the WooCommerce platform was very customizable. On top of all that, there is such a huge user base that there was a ton of resources to help me learn, and a [lot of extensions](#) that took care of what I wanted to accomplish.

Eli's biggest challenge was customizing the site to his liking — he “spent a long time writing bits of PHP and Javascript, and tons of HTML and CSS” — but in October of 2014 Universal Yums launched for pre-orders, and the very first box was shipped out that December.

Since then, both Monique and Eli have quit their jobs to work on their idea full-time. Universal Yums eventually grew too big for Eli's apartment in Cincinnati, and so the duo moved from there to run the business out of a new warehouse in New Jersey. [They now have several employees, and Universal Yums has hit seven figures in revenue as of this year.](#)

What they've learned from a million in sales, and the reddit hug of death

Scaling up to a million in sales wasn't easy, taking time and plenty of hard work. But the business did have a little help from an unexpected source: reddit.



Thanks, reddit!

[Eli posted the site to r/shutupandtakemymoney in 2014](#), resulting in roughly 200 orders almost immediately — what Monique later called her first “this is going to work out” moment.

Then, in late 2016, Monique ran an AMA (“ask me anything”) about the business. The influx of visitors and new subscribers [literally crashed the site in about 30 minutes](#) (jokingly known as the “reddit hug of death”):

It's funny, because I was so caught up answering the initial questions that I didn't even realize it. [...] I went to Google Analytics and saw that there were thousands of simultaneous users.

The site was (and still remains) hosted with WP Engine; even with only a little notice, they were able to do an emergency migration to get the site back up and running. Good on them!

Aside from learning to be prepared for site-crushing floods of traffic when posting on popular subreddits, Eli says the team has learned that it's [the little details that set them apart](#) from similar businesses. They do have competitors, but Universal Yums follows its own unique mission: to educate their customers about nations, cultures, and people in a fun and interesting way.

One of the ways that they do this is with [informative booklets included with each month's box](#). Monique takes the time to writes and design booklets that include trivia and historical facts about the country, plus descriptions of the snacks. Says Eli:

[Monique] wanted to develop herself as a writer, and initially, the booklets were a great way for her to do that. Now they're a huge asset to our business, since they provide a ton of interesting and fun information about the country we're visiting each month.

Monique also notes that [several of the snacks featured in their boxes have never been imported into North America](#). This exposes their subscribers to items they might otherwise never have an opportunity to try without paying for a large quantity or waiting a long while for an import.

All these little bits and bobs add up to create an [experience that can't be found anywhere else](#) — something as tasty and fun as it is educational.



Ukraine yums!

Eli advises anyone else taking

the same route to focus on their own little details:

Try to add your own “unique” touch to whatever is you're selling. Anyone can put something in a box and try to sell it online. What can you do that makes your business better?

Do you write a handwritten thank you note that accompanies every order? Wrap items in hot pink tissue paper? Put a free stick of gum in every box? The tiny details matter – much more than you might think!

The duo's best tips for hopeful entrepreneurs

We asked Monique and Eli for some more of their best advice for anyone thinking about starting a business of their own, whether a subscription model or otherwise. One of the best tips actually came from the reddit AMA, where Monique talked about [saving money by taking a DIY approach](#) to starting their business:

Learn how to do everything yourself, unless you absolutely cannot. We outsourced almost nothing, and in addition to saving us money it allowed us to make better decisions about how to outsource it later.

Today you can build amazing websites without touching a line of code. Look into WordPress, find a host that will install it for you. Many have a package that comes with it installed. Next choose a theme for your website – spend some money here.

If you can read enough, or have a good teacher, you could build a good looking website in 2 weeks.

Both mentioned some of the mistakes they had made early on, from communicating with suppliers to lacking a background in eCommerce. One mistake Monique learned from was [waiting too long to hire someone to help with the business](#):

We waited way too long to hire our first employee. We ended up feeling like we were behind constantly because we didn't take anything off our plates.

There's a tricky balance between doing it all and having someone help you. Monique's best advice? Do it yourself first so you know what the work entails, then you'll feel more comfortable handing it off.

This subscription-based snack business is an inspiration to us all

We're truly inspired by how Monique and Eli took a lunchtime business idea all the way to [subscription business generating seven figures](#). If you've been thinking about doing something similar, let the success of Universal Yums be the inspiration you need to give it a shot!

What do you think about the Universal Yums story? Have a WooCommerce subscription business of your own you'd like to show off? The comments are open and we'd love to hear from you. 🍪