

Automated Chai Machine to Easily Brew an Authentic Cup of Chai



Gaurav Chawla
CEO
Camellia Labs Inc.

CEOCFO: Mr. Chawla, what is the idea behind Camellia Labs?

Mr. Chawla: The idea behind the company is very simple. There are thousands of coffee machines but if you see the number of people who actually make and drink chai, it is a very large number. If you observe how they make chai, it is still a very manual process that is involved. It takes time, is messy and requires your full attention because making chai involves brewing black tea and spices with milk and because you are adding milk, there is a tendency for milk to boil over. You have to constantly watch it. The idea is to make this process automated so that people who love and drink chai have a simple and convenient way of making chai. We are making a connected appliance, Chime, which makes brewing an authentic cup of chai very simple.

CEOCFO: What were the challenges in creating the system?

Mr. Chawla: The challenging thing about creating this was this was not done in any of the existing machines, so it involved thinking through the process of what makes a good cup of chai, then observing how people make it manually and then replicating it in a machine format, which can fit under your kitchen cabinet. The challenging parts are handling milk, automating and giving controls to the user about things that they really care about.

CEOCFO: How much were you able to take from current technology such as in making coffee, and what did you have to come up with that is more of an original component?

Mr. Chawla: Right now, most coffee machines pass hot water through. We had to look at what is the right way to extract tea and the right way to handle milk. We took some inspiration from the tea kettles, but we came up with our own design from the ground up.

CEOCFO: Where are you in development, commercialization and availability?

Mr. Chawla: In terms of development, we are on third iteration and starting our fourth one, which is a pre-tooling prototype that we are working with a supplier. We are launching a limited run, pre-order campaign on our website, starting May 20th. We plan to get into production later this year and start shipping early next year.

CEOCFO: Why are you convinced that the convenience will overcome the idea that people like the personal making of chai?

Mr. Chawla: I make chai at least a couple of times every day and so do many other people. Before making this product, I actually talked to many people and said that I was making a chai brewer. Instantly, their faces would light up. They would say they would be my first customer. People have been looking for a product like this for over a decade and there is nothing that is available. Initially when people had more time and luxury of time, this was not an issue, but in today's world, you do not have time to watch milk boil. We try to spend that time doing something more productive. At the same time, people care about the taste and ingredients. We do not want to take control away from users for things that they really care about. We want to give them a way to still continue to make that great tasting chai with their own personalization without the mess.

CEOCFO: What will you be selling?

Mr. Chawla: We will be selling the device as well as pre-proportioned caps, which contain high grade, Indian black tea and spices. We will be selling that through our website and our mobile app.

CEOCFO: What is your plan for attracting attention?

Mr. Chawla: Right now, we are doing social media marketing events and the plan is to keep doing that. We know where our customer base is, what they do, so we know how to access them and mainly through online marketing as well as events.

CEOCFO: *What were some of the changes you went through as you were putting it together? What did you realize as you went along needed to be faster, better, smaller, larger?*

Mr. Chawla: As we developed every iteration, even the crudest version of the prototype, I took to the users and asked what they thought. I collected feedback and then did another one and gave it to them and collected feedback and now I am on the third iteration. What people told me that they cared about was the taste but also wanted to reduce the amount of work it required them to do. Our focus was to not only make sure that it is easy and convenient to use, but also after using it, how much work they have to do to maintain or clean the system.

CEOCFO: *How have you decided on the cost?*

Mr. Chawla: We decided we wanted to make a very high quality product. We wanted to make sure that for people that use this every day, it would last a few years. We also wanted to make sure that it looks beautiful because it is something that you are going to be using every day. You are not going to put any ugly kitchen appliance on your kitchen counter. That design and quality is what determined the cost.

CEOCFO: *What have you planned or looked into in terms of manufacturing? Will you be able to rev up quickly if needed?*

Mr. Chawla: We are partnering with a high end kitchen appliance manufacturer in China who has been delivering high quality kitchen appliances for other big brands in the US and Australia. We are confident that they will be able to meet the demand.

“We want to give [users] a way to still continue to make that great tasting chai with their own personalization without the mess.” - Gaurav Chawla

CEOCFO: *Do you foresee a large organization looking to purchase your company or to take advantage of what you have learned as an end game?*

Mr. Chawla: When I started this, my vision was to change the way people experience chai. There is a big enough market. I am driven by the mission that I want to bring this change to the world. I do not think too much about the end game. I want to make this product and business successful and that is what I think about every day.

CEOCFO: *What makes chai so special?*

Mr. Chawla: Tea is something that the British made popular in India in the early 20th century and throughout the next few decades it became ingrained in the Indian society so much that people had their own recipes and changed the ingredients and spices that they would put in it. It became this central thing very prevalent in Indian life. Then immigrants to US and other countries took that drink with them. Even though there are about three million Indians who live in US and Canada, if you see a lot of them even after being in America, they still drink chai. Some of them have switched because of convenience, taste or higher caffeine needs. Many people still love their chai as they did in India. Now you see a resurgence of tea in American society too with Starbucks and the younger generation actually preferring tea to coffee.

CEOCFO: *What surprised you along the way?*

Mr. Chawla: As I started building this, what surprised me was how much work there is to bring a product like this to market.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about TIEcon?*

Mr. Chawla: TIEcon is this event where every year, about four to five thousand technology entrepreneur, investors and people in technology come together. It is an event based around fostering entrepreneurship. That event was last weekend in Santa Clara. We had a booth and many people stopped by. We were really surprised that lots of people were so impressed with the invention. We are excited about getting this product in their companies and homes.

CEOCFO: *Why is Camellia Labs a company to watch?*

Mr. Chawla: On the coffee side there have been many innovations and many companies that have made the coffee world beautiful, but on the tea side there has not been much technology that has helped users. Users still use technology like tea bags, which were invented in the 1920's. There is an equal number of people who drink tea vs. coffee, so there is a big market and it needs a lot of design love.

For more information visit: www.camellialabs.com

Contact: Gaurav Chawla gaurav@brewchime.com