

## Cincinnati-made hot sauce gets picked up for store distribution



Kai Schneider moved back to his native Cincinnati to launch Dude, Seriously hot sauce.

A hot sauce brand launched in Cincinnati by a Silicon Valley entrepreneur who returned to his hometown will soon be on shelves in brick-and-mortar stores.

The *Courier* wrote about [Kai Schneider earlier this year](#). To recap, Schneider was born and raised in Cincinnati, but moved to California to attend Pepperdine University in Malibu, Calif. He went on (through a Cincinnati connection, no less) to work in talent management in Los Angeles and transitioned to the tech sector in Silicon Valley before moving to Cincinnati to launch Dude, Seriously hot sauce.

Schneider is now working with Cincinnati-based Topicz to distribute Dude, Seriously to delis, convenience stores and gas stations in Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, West Virginia and Tennessee.

"This is my first foray into retailing anything," Schneider told me. "I was a digital guy all my life – we created a product, put it online and it went. This is a different beast for me, so I'm learning it as I go."

The first brick-and-mortar retailer to carry Dude, Seriously is the Street Corner Market at the Banks at 160 Walnut St. Other retailers will come on line in January 2018. Dude, Seriously is also sold at Taft's Ale House as its in-house hot sauce, but otherwise sales are handled entirely online.

So what makes Dude, Seriously different, and seriously, where does the name come from?

After graduating with a bachelor's in advertising from Pepperdine, Schneider ran into [Jimmy Gould](#) in a Cincinnati Blockbuster Video, who introduced him to the Firm, a Los Angeles talent and model management agency that represented names like [Martin Lawrence](#) and the Backstreet Boys.

Schneider's college roommate also got a job with the Firm before leaving to work for Von Dutch, the trucker hat company that became a monumental craze during the early aughts. That's where he learned the value of branding, and as it collapsed ([Paris Hilton](#), one of the early adopters of the Von Dutch trucker hat, later said it was one of her largest fashion mistakes) he came up with an idea – introducing Dude, Seriously as a brand. It was a phrase, he said, that you could see worn by someone like Hilton and you have have the same reaction whether you love or hate her: "Dude, seriously?"

Schneider went on to work for Playlist.com, one of the largest internet music streaming services in the mid-2000s. From there he went on to work for video-sharing platform Metacafe and became an investor and owner in Guidebox.com, which helps users find streaming content.

While at Metacafe, Schneider, an avowed fan of everything hot sauce, met with [Ray St. Martin](#) of SB Nation. During the meeting, St. Martin asked Schneider to meet him at his car afterward. In his trunk were 10 boxes of hot sauce.

St. Martin's hot sauce, as it turns out, had a pedigree. St. Martin had met up with a guy named [Tommy Villanueva](#). Villanueva was a former bartender at the Copacabana Club in New York, where he would make Bloody Marys for the Rat Pack. They brought him to the Sands in Las Vegas to keep making those Bloody Marys. The hot sauce was based off of that Bloody Mary recipe.

As Schneider tells it, St. Martin and Villanueva were set to go into business, but Villanueva died of cancer and the business was shuttered. In 2015, St. Martin reached back out and sold the business to Schneider.

It's Schneider's goal to branch into major retailers like [Kroger](#) and even land on every restaurant table across the city. "Cincinnati has so many great local restaurants, but we're serving hot sauce made in Louisiana on the table," he said.