

For Generations Harney & Sons Tea Provided the World with Luxury Tea Blends



Michael Harney
Founder's son and CEO



Paul Harney
Founder's son and CEO

Harney & Sons
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Interview conducted by:
Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: *How did Harney & Sons get started? Tell us a bit about the founder.*

Michael Harney: In the 1960's, John Harney was running the White Hart Inn in Salisbury, Connecticut. A tiny Englishman came and talked with him. Stanley Mason had retired up there. He had sold tea in NYC and was the 3rd generation of his family in tea. Stanley talked John into serving his teas, and after a few years to buy the company. That is how John started in tea.

CEOCFO: *Where and how is Harney & Sons tea sourced?*

Michael Harney: Our teas come from Asia (China, India, Japan, Taiwan, & Sri Lanka), Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, & Rwanda) and South America (Argentina & Colombia). We choose from samples and the tea is shipped from those countries.

"Our commitment to great tea has only gotten stronger over the years. We have come to realize that is what sets us apart. So we look to only increase that competitive advantage."- Michael Harney

CEOCFO: *You have gone from distribution in the Northeast United States to all over the world. How have you expanded so far?*

Michael Harney: Great teas are in high demand. As John Harney said, Finding good teas is hard work but possible. Most tea companies do not want to do that hard work. So our teas stand out as a delight to drink.

CEOCFO: *What products do you offer today? How do they function?*

Michael Harney: We offer hot teas, Iced teas, herbal tisanes, Ready to drink Iced Teas, Nitro Tea, and beverages form friends like Coconut water form Thailand and Bruce Cost Ginger Ale.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about some representative projects? Trips, sponsorships, etc.*

Michael Harney: We went to London in September. We are capitalizing upon our tea connections to see special places that have relationships with tea: Botanical Gardens whose curators work with tea more than a century ago, Historic Royal Palaces, The Dorchester Hotel, and more.

CEOCFO: *When you speak with a potential customers or buyers do they easily understand the superiority you offer?*

Michael Harney: Many do understand that we are the best. However there are still enough that do not to keep me getting up in the morning.

CEOCFO: *How do you reach out to spread the word about Harney & Sons?*

Michael Harney: We travel the world. I was just in Shanghai, Taipei, Changsha, Hong Kong drinking our tea. To me that is impressive. Later this month I travel to Italy and that country is known to drink espresso and almost no tea. Yet I will drink our tea in Milan, Venice, and Rome. We do have a website for consumers which does quite well explaining the benefits of great tasting tea. Also we have a sales force in NYC and the rest of the country that goes to trade shows. And my wife would kill me if I did not mention our 2 lovely shops, one near our factory and the other is in SoHo in NYC.

CEOCFO: *What, if anything, has changed in your approach over time?*

Michael Harney: Our commitment to great tea has only gotten stronger over the years. We have come to realize that is what sets us apart. So we look to only increase that competitive advantage.

CEOCFO: *What are the next steps for you?*

Michael Harney: Me? I think that my kids would not mind if I slowed down, but I am excited to keep growing the company. To keep buying great teas from around the world, and to keep showing people those teas.

CEOCFO: *Why is Harney & Sons an important company? What sets Harney & Sons tea apart from competitors?*

Michael Harney: We are not saving the world, however we are trying to be fair to our customers and our employees. We have made many a customer become happy, and seen employees grow. This is something our father and founder taught us, and we are teaching the next generation. I think this is something that people – both consumers and people in trade appreciate.