

How One App Is Changing the Game for Black-Owned Businesses

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Photo credit: Brian David

Growing up, David Cabello moved frequently and quickly figured out how to make a buck. As he bounced between New Jersey, North Carolina and the suburbs of Philadelphia, he tailored his services to what locals needed.

“I was a hustler,” says Cabello, who is now 26 years old. “I did whatever I could do to not be broke: I sold packs of gum. I came up with a business called the Weather Workers. We would shovel snow, rake leaves, cut grass, whatever the season called for.” Fast forward to 2019: Cabello was still hustling, delivering food for apps like Caviar and Uber Eats. He briefly attended Pennsylvania’s Shippensburg University, where he majored in business. After the 2016 election, Cabello and his twin brother, Aaron, “had an awakening about the plight that Black people have to go through.” He knew he had to act. “We wanted to affect change,” he says.

One day, while scanning through his past food deliveries, something clicked.

“I noticed that none of the restaurants I was picking up from were Black-owned,” he says. “I said to myself, ‘If I can’t find Black-owned restaurants on any of the existing services, why don’t I create my own?’”

This is how **Black and Mobile** came to be. Founded in 2019, the delivery app serves as a directory of Black-owned restaurants in several cities and makes ordering from them simple and seamless. In doing so, Cabello and his brother are helping the Black community in profound ways.

In June, the Los Angeles Times reported that more new Black-owned businesses launched last year than at any time in the last quarter century, citing an annual study by the Kauffman Foundation. In the past year, several major corporations made public commitments to help fund Black-owned businesses. Black and Mobile arrived at the right moment. After gaining ground in Philadelphia—the app is now available in three cities, with more on the way—the app was featured in the music video for “Entrepreneur,” the 2020 hit from Jay-Z and Pharrell.

“The biggest thing for us is that the dollars spent stay in our community,” Cabello says. “The circulation of the dollar is most important. As Black men, gainfully employing people in our community is hugely important to us.”

Self-taught technologist

Given the many hours he’d logged working for other services, Cabello knew the day-to-day grind of the food delivery industry. He taught himself the technology part, creating Black and Mobile’s website and inaugural app through Shopify. An updated app, coming soon, is being coded by a Black-owned software development company.

Charm and strategy helped him get restaurants on board. “Sometimes I have to sell the concept of Black and Mobile a lot,” he says, “sometimes I barely have to say anything at all.”

While many third-party delivery apps take a 25-percent cut of each order, Black and Mobile plans to cap their fee at 20-percent, and will go as low as 13-percent for exclusive partnerships, in which Black and Mobile serves as a restaurant’s sole delivery provider.

Mobile entrepreneur

Cabello built up a roster of restaurants in Philadelphia before expanding Black and Mobile into Atlanta last summer; this month, the app forges into New York City, and then it’s on to Houston and Los Angeles. Cabello and his brother zero in on potential restaurants to bring on board by researching online and on social media. Sometimes

restaurants reach out to them, and their mom often lends a hand: “She direct-messages me restaurants all the time,” Cabello says. But nothing beats boots-on-the-ground—or wheels-on-the-ground—reconnaissance.

“When we get to a city, we ride around on our bikes and find places,” says Cabello. “It’s the long way, but it’s the only way. There’s no place that has every Black-owned restaurant listed. We’re creating that.”

The journey hasn’t been without obstacles. “The day I got my first partnership with a restaurant, I was so excited, I had to blow off some energy,” says Cabello. He bounded over to the nearest basketball court. “I landed wrong and fractured my foot,” he says. “I couldn’t walk for 50 days. Once I could start walking, I said, ‘I’m starting this business no matter what.’”

He laid the groundwork for Black and Mobile and got the app up and running. All the while, he continued delivering food for another app service, trying to make ends meet. “I prayed to God and said, ‘Please fire me. I’m not going hard enough for Black and Mobile,’” he says. A week later, he was out on a delivery run when the very first Black and Mobile order pinged on his phone. “I totally forgot about the other order,” he says. His prayers were granted.

2020 came with pros and cons. “People were ordering like crazy,” says Cabello. “It was a blessing for us to stay in business, and our orders shot up. The Black Lives Matter movement was even bigger than the pandemic. After George Floyd, after Breonna Taylor, people took action to show they cared about Black businesses. They were making an effort. The only bad thing is, it sometimes feels like bad things have to happen to Black people for us to receive support. It shouldn’t be that way.”

Black and Mobile is actively working to change that, to lift up Black-owned businesses and keep them on the radar of consumers. For all the ups and downs, Black and Mobile is now solidly in the black.

The business did \$25,000 in sales in its first year and \$500,000 in 2020. Beyond the updated app and continuing to launch in new markets, Cabello looks forward to expanding what Black and Mobile delivers. Clothes, shoes, household supplies? All up for discussion. Black and Mobile’s tagline is “the culture delivered”—with that kind of branding, the sky’s the limit. And while he continues to hustle, Cabello’s got nothing but respect for the apps that he used to work for, that helped him have a lightbulb moment and seize his purpose.

“At the end of the day, you can support them and us,” he says. “We’re just going to bring a different culture to it and expose you to new foods, new flavors, new favorites.”

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About the author(s):

Sheila is a writer for several publications; her first novel, "The Goddess Effect," is forthcoming.

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