

# Shisha Masters

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CZECH  
MATE

ENTER  
THE  
SMOKER'S  
CORNER  
WITH LOUNGE  
CONSULTANT,  
BLOGGER &  
AUTHOR

Jakub  
Kopáček

DÝMKAŘŮV KOUTEK

**When ESCA launched its campaign to mobilize the shisha community in response to the European Commission’s Public Consultation on tobacco taxation, one country stood out with the highest number of shisha responses. The Czech Republic. Thanks to Jakub Kopáček, a young entrepreneur and founder of the hookah blogsite & consulting firm, Dýmkařův Koutek, he mobilized a large number of his followers to have their say in the consultation process. This month we speak to Jakub about his work, his book and how he has built his blogsite to be the most successful in the Czech Republic.**

**Jakub** was born and raised in Bohumin, a small town in the eastern part of the Czech Republic. He studied his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Marketing and Public Relations at Charles University in Prague. At the young age of 26, he has become an entrepreneur in the shisha industry and has written a book called Dýmkařská Bichle (translating roughly as the Large Book of Hookah).

**What is your business all about? What are your main tasks when doing ‘shisha consulting’?** My mission is to collect and share all the hookah knowledge for hookah users to study, enjoy and improve their skills. I practice it in several forms and ways. The core of my projects is my blogsite called Dýmkařův Koutek (The Smoker’s Corner). I have written it in Czech since 2015 and have published hundreds of articles so far. The blogsite was awarded as the third best blogsite in CZE in 2016, which was amazing. I started to make videos on YouTube and a hookah related podcast on all available platforms. I also moderate the majority of hookah events in the Czech Republic and I love it, because crowds of hookah enthusiasts give me energy and put me in a good mood. However, the biggest challenge is the book I have written which was published by the biggest publishing house in CZE in 2018 and so far 4,000 copies have been sold.

In 2013, I was working as a “hookah master” in a lounge for several months. In 2015, I started working at iSmoke – the biggest chain of retail hookah shops in Czech Republic. In 2017, I launched my own business and became self-employed. From that moment, it was a rollercoaster. But, the core of my business is to provide consulting services for lounges, shops, brands and the general public on several topics. For example lounge construction and procedures, the legislation, selection of hookah gear, mentoring of professionals and rookies, project management, marketing and communication issues, hookah masterclasses for entrepreneurs and general public etc.



**“CONSULTING SERVICES ON LOUNGE CONSTRUCTION AND PROCESSES, SELECTION OF ITEMS, LEGISLATIVE ISSUES, MENTORING AND MARKETING”**

**What made you decide to start Dýmkařův Koutek?** Firstly, the lack of accessible hookah knowledge in the Czech language. Secondly, some of my classmates at college were successful bloggers and that motivated me to do something on my own. And finally, my Czech language teacher told me several times that I write great essays. People are lazy to read these days, so I have decided to put a lot of jokes, gimmicks, word play, poems, irony, sarcasm and humor inside my texts. The result was great and unique! My audience likes it a lot, because they can educate themselves on hookah topics and it’s not boring to read.

**Can you remember the first shisha and shisha flavour you ever tried?** Of course! My parent’s hookah, a small Top Mark with the basic accessories. I was enjoying Al Fakher Honey and all of the sudden fell in love with hookahs. From my current point of view, the whole setup was a disaster, but you’ve got to start with something, right?

**What is your favourite shisha flavour and why?** Tough question. I have dozens of favourite flavors! I like citrus flavours the most. Let’s say Bary Orange from Darkside, Pink Grapefruit from Tangiers, Lemon from Element and Red Orange from Black Burn. What is the best flavour I have ever smoked? Cactus Breeze from Fantasia!



**Describe the shisha scene in the Czech Republic.** In the Czech Republic, hookahs emerged in the 1990s. I would like to point out that our land has no cultural background or geographical connection to the countries of hookah origin. To be precise, our hookah culture was built from scratch by native Czechs with just a little Arabic influence. It all started in the tea rooms.

We did not have any hookah cafés, lounges or bars in the past. Instead of them, we have developed a unique place called the tea room. This establishment was a mix of different cultures, traditions, habits, but foremost the mix of tea drinking and enjoying a hookah. You could easily drink teas from China, India, Japan, Turkey etc., eat Arabic or Lebanese food, enjoy hookahs and be surrounded by some kind of new age stuff like mandalas, esoteric music and incense sticks.

Our Czech community and industry scenes are unparalleled. A small country of 10.5 million people consists of approx. 100,000 active hookah users. The active core of our community gathers about 10,000 enthusiasts. We communicate via Facebook groups, Telegram chats and fora. Community people here could be easily described as vivid, hookah knowledge seeking, innovative personas.

We have given to the hookah world the idea of silicon hoses (Meduse), the best hookah bases (Bohemian Glass) and the first luxurious glass hookahs (Meduse), for example. We also have some of the best quality hookah places in Europe and I am really proud of it.

Our industry boasts a massive hookah, accessories and tobacco distributor (Shanti), a few hookah shop chains (iSmoke, Hookahzone), two tobacco brands (Meditate, Theo) and several hookah and accessories producers (marvin smoke, Valravn Crafts, Amfora, Epic Crafts, Wood Works Club, Meduse, Shisha Original, Klifides etc.).

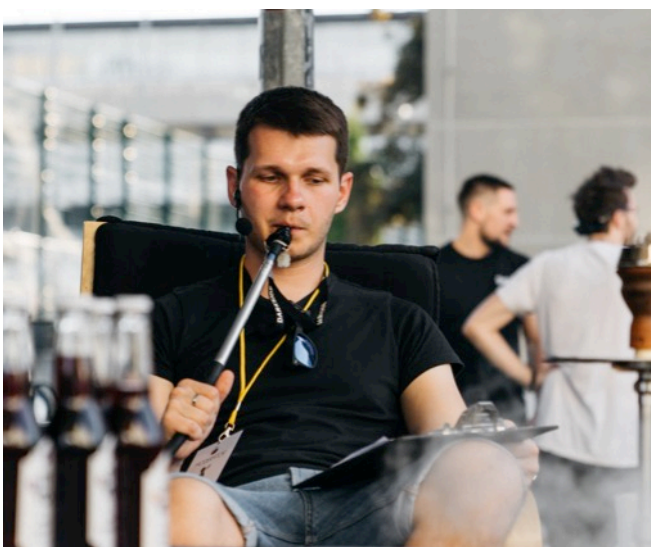


**“COMMUNITY AND INDUSTRY SCENES ARE UNPARALLELED. A SMALL COUNTRY OF 10.5 MILLION PEOPLE CONSISTS OF APPROX. 100,000 ACTIVE HOOKAH SMOKERS”**

**What challenges have you had to face in the sector when building your blog and business?**

The biggest challenge was to develop certain skills. Regarding my blogsite, I had to find my own style, which was quite easy, but the creative process doesn't end with just writing. The technical part was far more difficult for me: to learn how to work with my platform, how to manage the communication with my audience, how to work with the camera, lights, sound and everything related to making other content than articles. But first and foremost, I had to learn the important skill of time management.

Time management is essential also for my business. It was one of the biggest challenges for me, because I was still a student when I started to work as a freelancer. I failed miserably at the beginning. I also failed with my first clients. The reason was that I was new in the world of freelancers. I struggled to set my price, for example, and also communicate the relationship between my price and work. But the biggest challenge for me was building the whole business, because it was completely new! Based on my knowledge, the hookah consultants are very rare in our industry and there were none in the Czech Republic yet. So I had to develop everything around an entirely new job.





**Has your project suffered from the Covid-19 consequences? How have you managed to survive through the pandemic?**

I experienced a massive growth in business in times of the Covid-19 pandemic. The tea rooms and shisha bars were shut down, so lots of people started to buy hookahs and tobacco to enjoy at home. Their need for information, skill and expertise on using a hookah drove them to require guidance from me. So, I have not only survived the Corona crisis, my business has grown significantly since the start of pandemic.

**Why do you think shisha has become so popular?**

Not only Nokia connects people, the hookahs too. It is a social tool for us to meet new people, make friends and enjoy every moment accompanied by a hookah. For young adults, it represents a better way to spend their leisure time instead of drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes or taking drugs. Our hookah tobacco also tastes good, leaves no odour and offers the mystery of a ritual – the ritual of relaxing, preparation and sharing.

**Other than yourself of course, who is your favourite shisha blogger or influencer? And why?** From Germany, it's a duo of Aljoscha (Hookaze) and Yannic (Kvssel). I also admire Hookah John (hookahjohn.com), Anton (JohnCalliano), Dava (dava\_smoke), Nuahule and Gabriel (gbsakamoto). I grew up also with the work of Jay&Kai (Brocontra Germany) and hookah-images-official. All of these guys are true professionals, most of them my friends and they work hard to make our hookah culture better on a worldwide scale.

**“Shisha is a social tool for us to meet new people, make friends and enjoy every moment accompanied by a hookah”**



**What is the secret to becoming a popular blogger for shisha?**

You must be original. Nobody cares about copies. You have to set some standards for your content, find your tone of voice and stick to your area of expertise. Do not be jealous, aggressive, intolerant or cocky. Your first and main goal shouldn't be money making, this is the recipe for failure. Find your own thing, for example reviewing lounges, making cool hookah photos, shooting a podcast about hookah related things etc. and work hard to be the best on the market!

**Where do you see the shisha business in the Czech Republic in 10 years?**

I hope that local authorities or the European Union will not intervene much, because some of the new legislation is horrifying. Our hookah scene could also get some publicity and rise from the underground. The number of lounges will get higher, so will the number of hookah enthusiasts. We will host international expos, competitions and finally, the Czech Republic will be recognised as one of the key players in the hookah scene worldwide.

**If you could choose any company or business person in the world, which do you admire the most? And Why?**

When I step off the hookah scene, it's deadmau5. An electronic music producer famous for his mau5 head that he is wearing on stage. For twenty years he is true to his standards and he keeps his creativity flowing. I admire his connection with his audience, communication with the crowd and his marketing skills. I am also a huge fan of his music!

**What goals do you have for your life business/project?** At the end of my days, I want to get the feeling that I gave the hookah industry every part of my creative ideas and left a mark there. In the meantime, I want to start my own hookah educational expo for professionals in the Czech Republic, something like Prokachaem. Maybe to my own lounge in the future. But for now, I really enjoy my diverse work and want to try as many things in the hookah industry as possible.

**What changes have you made to your business strategy during the last years?** I used to put my whole time into hookahs. Replying on every message (I get a lot of them every day) at once, doing a lot of free work and now promoting my business a lot. Right now, I found a balance between my life and work. I am focused on teaching young enthusiastic people and entrepreneurs about the hookah topic and promoting my work correctly.

**When someone wants to start a new shisha business and they come to you for help, what are the most common mistakes they make?** Using hookah just once, for example. Opening a hookah place is a cool thing these days, so it attracts people with a different background. They often do not have a business plan. Also they are sometimes low on the budget. However, most of them lack vision. They just want to copy a functional concept, not interested in adding something new.

**What 3 things can you NOT live without?** Good food, love and hookahs!

**What three skills are needed to be successful in business?** Time management, hard work and communication skills. Also a huge portion of luck.

**What has been your most satisfying moment in business?** When I published my first hookah book, the first batch was sold in 24 days (1,000 copies).

**Can you describe your typical day?** How many hours a day do you usually work or think about work? As a freelancer, the whole day every day, hah. It could be six hours, sometimes three and randomly even the whole day of working. At 10 AM after breakfast I start to work. Then lunch and some siesta, right after it comes a hookah and work again. I love when I break the trend with some business travels and offline meetings.

**Considering all the individual parts of the shisha hose, bowl, stem, head, coal describe your perfect shisha set up?** Tough one! Ok, for the hookah they are Soft Smoke Lite with a Body Kit or Steamulation PRO X. My favorite bowl is Smokelab V2, the beloved HMD is CWP Heat Keeper accompanied with the Blackcoco charcoals. I do not care about hoses much, but my favorite work hose is Starbuzz Maximus.

**Where is the best venue in the world to enjoy a shisha?** My living room! The best experience I had was in Fog Factory in Kiev, Tangiers Lounge in St.Petersburg, Edgar's in Prague and Dobrá čajovna in Olomouc.



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KOUTEK**

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**ESCA works to promote shisha and to educate the public and political leaders about the tradition of shisha and those who use it.**

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