

Sole-Zine

Proforma: participants

Participant's details

Name	Organisation	Role	Relationship to Sole-Zine	Date of participation	Consent confirmation
Sam Byrne	Block-P (sneaker store / Air Max 95 archive, Liverpool)	Business partner and investor; leads community, storytelling, and academic engagement	Participant / interviewee	11.08.26	✓

The 'BEFORE' Stage | Your Connection to the Trainer Subculture

1. Have you been involved professionally in other projects which document sneaker subculture? If yes, please explain.

No. Sam had no prior professional involvement in documenting sneaker subculture. He studied economics at the University of Liverpool and treated sneaker culture as a personal passion rather than an academic or professional pursuit.

"Being from around here, sneaker culture doesn't seem like a very academic topic, you know. I went to university myself, I studied economics at the University of Liverpool, but this had always been like a hobby for me, like a passion project. So I didn't know there was publications out there, I didn't know there was any real like articles or magazines about stuff like this."
[04:56-05:12]

He notes that the connection to Sole-Zine came about only when Charlie (his business partner) met Paul at the Laces Out event:

"...until Charlie met Paul, at Laces Out." [05:21]

2. Before becoming involved with Sole-Zine, what methods did you typically use to share your interest / expertise / passion / work, to gain visibility and/or recognition within the sneaker community?

Before Sole-Zine, Block-P's communication was almost entirely sales-driven, primarily through social media (Instagram). There was little storytelling or community-focused content.

"Before it was kind of... we'd focus on money and build, and we still do that now, but things have shifted in terms of the content, whereas like all the content we used to post was... 'buy this, buy this, buy this' there wasn't really any like feel-good valuable content, where like it's it gives you that warm feeling inside and fosters connection." [11:37]

The store also relied on **in-store retail experience** and **brand collaborations** (e.g., their Air Max 95 collaboration with Lorenzo) as primary visibility channels, but these were commercially rather than culturally driven.

3. Had you previously participated in projects that documented sneaker culture and/or related practice? If yes, what impact did those experiences have?

No. Sam indicates he had not previously participated in any documentary or academic projects about sneaker culture. His awareness of the field was limited before encountering Paul and Sole-Zine:

"I didn't know there was publications out there, I didn't know there was any real like articles or magazines about stuff like this." [05:12]

The impact of discovering this world was significant — it shifted both his personal outlook and the strategic direction of the business (see Q5 and Q9).

The 'DURING' Stage | Experience of Participation

4. What motivated you to participate in Sole-Zine?

Sam was motivated by a genuine personal connection with Paul and a desire to document and preserve community stories, and a belief in the importance of bridging sneaker culture with academia.

"Is a great point to bring people together, is a shared love for a shoe, and each person has a different story they can tell. Like Deedee, one of our good customers, he's.. I'll tell the story of how he lost his, his dad in 1997 and he was only 12, but two years ago his dad's got him into Air Max 95 in 1995. When he came out, there's a picture of him and his dad on the fishing trip, both wearing the Air Max 95 and now DeeDee is 40, and he's got his son Jake into Air Max 95, and he came in and told his story, and he's got the pair of 1995 neons next to him, and that is so special, because his dad is actually buried in the Air Max 95 so every time Dee Dee puts a pair of Air Max 95 on, he's connected to his dad". [07:24]

"It excites me just learning and getting involved with it, and if it helps you guys showing the story and relating our culture to academia. I think that's really important. It's important that this is documented." [22:02]

5. During your involvement with Sole-Zine, did you gain any new perspectives on your own practice, expertise, or role within the sneaker community?

Yes, significantly. Sam credits Sole-Zine with making him realise the business had a duty to tell community stories and bring people together, rather than purely driving sales. This led directly to new content series and community events.

"Paul kind of made me realize we have a duty to kind of spread this message and bring people together, but when you're immersed in the culture, it's hard to see." [11:37]

"it's only been recently where I've pushed hard to Charlie to be like, look, we need to do a storytelling series, so we can position this to Nike to be like 'we are the voice of the streets', 'we're the voice of what one tends being to Liverpool as a city', and here's our community, and let's tell their story." [11:37]

He also gained a deeper appreciation for the cultural and emotional significance of the Air Max 95:

"I didn't realize how important shoes are in people's lives, specifically the 110 in my kind of experience." [08:59]

6. How effectively do you feel Sole-Zine represented your work / skills / knowledge / experience and/or contribution to sneaker culture?

Sam feels Sole-Zine represented his work effectively, particularly through community voices, cultural history, and in-person interviews. He emphasises that interviews are the most powerful format for communicating meaning.

"I'd probably say community voices really, that kind of touches on to that, the new content series we've just launched." [06:43]

"I'd say in-person interviews and speaking to them... it's hard to connect over a photo, a photo for me is a memory of a given time... whereas like to understand again, understanding and interview in person is by far the best way." [11:04 – 11:22]

He also highlights cultural history and emotional connection as areas Sole-Zine captured well:

"the cultural history massively helped. Emotional connection, for sure." [08:59]

The tangible magazines have become a key representation tool for the business:

"Every time someone from Nike comes in the store, they get both the magazines, so it's really good to have that sort of tangible to be like 'here we are, here's our community, here's what we represent.'" [16:07]

7. Did participating in Sole-Zine help you connect with new audiences / communities / researchers / educators / brands / and/or industry professionals (locally, nationally or globally)?

Yes. The Sole-Zine magazines are now displayed at Nike HQ giving Block-P visibility with Nike employees at a corporate level:

"they're now on the wall in the Nike HQ in Hillson in the Nike office, so that the employees at Nike can look at that and go, this is what we do it for. It's micro communities like this that are important." [17:16]

Sam also connected with George from The Sole Supplier, from whom he gained strategic content advice:

"I've spoken to Paul, I spoken to George from the sole supplier, and, like, he just kind of picked things up in the way that, like, George said something really interesting to me." [11:37]

He has also now actively seeks out academic articles in relation to sneaker subculture:

"I've kind of got mates and stuff now who'll send me articles specifically, and academic articles, whether that be published papers or just like people who've written blog posts online."
[18:44]

The 'AFTER' Stage | Outcomes and Opportunities

8. Has being featured in Sole-Zine changed how others perceive your work, expertise, or role within sneaker culture? If so, how?

Sam is modest but acknowledges that Block-P holds a unique position of credibility as the only dedicated Air Max 95 store and archive in the world, and that Sole-Zine has helped communicate that to a wider audience, including Nike.

"we're the only Air Max 95 store archive in the world, so in terms of credibility on one silhouette of shoe, then yeah, because there's no one. Who does what we do? It's by definition the only people who do it in the world." [19:43]

The magazines at Nike HQ have shifted how the brand perceives Block-P's community work:

"the employees at Nike can look at that and go, this is what we do it for. It's micro communities like this that are important. That's what we want to help." [17:16]

Sole-Zine also helped elevate Liverpool's sneaker culture, which Sam feels is underrepresented compared to London:

"when people look at sneaker culture in the UK, it's probably more of, like a London thing, with Jordans, SBS, Dunks, like, it's only really when you come up north, you see the 110 and what it means to people, and definitely helps having SOLE ZINE to help tell that story." [24:08]

9. Have any specific opportunities resulted from your involvement with Sole-Zine?

Yes – multiple.

- **Nike collaboration pitch:** Sam is building a pitch deck for a community-designed Air Max 95 collaboration with Nike, using Sole-Zine content as supporting evidence: *"I want our own Air Max 95 a Block-P collaboration with Nike... it would be a shoe designed by the community, for the community, for the city of Liverpool, and that would be so special, so as part of the pitch deck that I'm currently working on to pitch this Nike, all the community events we've done, like we did one with SOLE ZINE on the 110 voices."* [16:07]
- **New content series – "Soul Stories":** a storytelling series highlighting community members' stories through Air Max 95s, inspired directly by the Sole-Zine relationship: *"the new content series we've launched now off the back of this is, it's called Soul Stories, which is where we highlight people's stories through 110s and explain like their story through 110s and what they mean to them, and we wouldn't have done that certainly without dealing with Paul."* [05:44]
- **Community events:** including a rap event featuring local artists, a city-wide shoe-drop scavenger hunt, and the "110 Voices" spray-painted 3D shoe display: *"we put on a rap*

event, which was like highlighting local artists in the city, giving them a platform to come and, you know, spit some bars and drop their music." [15:13]

- **Increased academic engagement:** Sam now actively seeks out academic articles about sneaker culture. [18:44]
- **Nike HQ visibility:** the Sole-Zine magazines are displayed at Nike's offices. [17:16]

10. In your view, what contribution does Sole-Zine make to preserving and sharing knowledge within sneaker culture?

Sam's response endorses virtually all the listed contributions:

"Yeah. Yes, community history is definitely. Personal stories, specialist knowledge, local culture, craft skills. Yeah, all of it, pretty much all of it." [23:42]

Based on his interview, the following would be ticked:

- Recording personal stories, experiences, and memories from within the sneaker community.
- Documenting specialist skills such as restoration, repair, customisation, cleaning, collecting, authentication, or archiving.
- Preserving knowledge that is often shared informally between community members.
- Capturing practices that may otherwise be overlooked or undocumented.
- Increasing public awareness and understanding of sneaker culture.
- Providing a platform for voices and perspectives that are not often represented in mainstream media or academic research.
- Creating a lasting record of people, places, events, and practices within the community.
- Showcasing different generations of sneaker enthusiasts and practitioners.
- Challenging stereotypes or misconceptions about sneaker communities.
- Preserving local, regional, or community-specific histories and identities.

He specifically highlights the **underrepresentation of Liverpool** and the role Sole-Zine plays in addressing that:

"I feel like the whole community is is underrepresented, but I feel like that's just Liverpool as a city in general... it's only really when you come up north, you see the 110 and what it means to people, and definitely helps having SOLE ZINE to help tell that story." [24:08]

The 'Legacy' Stage: Future Value

11. On a scale of 1-10, how interested are you in continuing to work with Sole-Zine in the future?

Rating: 10 (Extremely interested)

"Definitely... yeah, for sure. I feel like you know it's mutually beneficial, and it's.. I find it really interesting. I can't speak for you guys, but yeah, just think it's.. it excites me just learning and getting involved with it, and if it helps you guys showing the story and relating our culture to academia. I think that's really important. It's important that this is documented." [22:02]

12. Is there anything else you would like to add about the significance, value, or future potential of Sole-Zine?

Sam sees the future potential of Sole-Zine as limitless, with many opportunities for collaboration:

"I think the future potentials limitless, really. It's just what I mean, what ideas come and how it can be executed. I feel like there's so many overlaps, and there's so many projects we're working on, anyway. Just any, anything we work on, it'd be cool to get involved with, but no, there's no, no limits to anything." [25:51]

He also reflects on the importance of **bridging the gap between academia and sneaker culture**, while acknowledging the difficulty:

"It's so hard because they're so different, yeah, different worlds, but I feel it's important to try and bridge the gap, but actually trying to do it is really hard." [26:37 – 26:41]

He cites people who embody that bridge — himself and others he follows — as evidence that it is possible:

"you've got people like me who are academic but like love the culture as well, and there are definitely people like that. I've been following on a guy on LinkedIn called Jolien, and he's he seems very similar, where he's like top academic, like really really smart guy, but is like who loves brands and the culture." [26:41]