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PingPod is bringing pingpong to New York City neighborhoods one table at a time

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A couple of players playing ping pong at one of PingPod's locations in New York City. JORDAN RATHKOPF

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By **Julian Nazar** – Staff Reporter, New York Business Journal
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David Silberman wants to bring pingpong tables to every New York City neighborhood.

“Right now, there are plenty of gaps in the market,” Silberman, who is the co-founder and CFO of PingPod, told the New York Business Journal. “We’ve just scratched the tip of the iceberg on Brooklyn and Queens, and we don’t have a presence in the Bronx.”

PingPod will open its sixth location in downtown Brooklyn Feb. 15 and expects to open two more locations in Manhattan in the spring.

After quitting his job at UBS Securities in May of 2019, Silberman saw an opportunity to create a business around an activity he had loved ever since he was 5 years old. He recalls that pingpong social club SPIN was the only place in the city that offered pingpong at the time.

“There was a supply/demand imbalance in the market in New York City,” Silberman said.



PingPod's CFO and Co-Founder David Silberman. PINGPOD

He and his co-founders **Ernesto Ebuén** and **Max Kogler** launched PingPod in February of 2020 and have opened five locations so far.

To play at one of the fully automated table tennis spaces, you need to create a free account by either downloading the iOS app or visiting the website. Once you create an account, you choose a location and select a table and a specific time. The spaces are available 24/7.

After you check out, the reservation is sent to your phone. When you arrive, you simply tap the button on your phone to unlock the door.

Depending on the time and the table you select, it could cost as much as \$50 per hour. That would be the price regardless of how many people you bring to the pod. However, Silberman said it’s free for members who decide to play at an off-peak time.

Silberman's original plan was to open a concept similar to SPIN. However, since he had limited funds, he pivoted to the smaller-format concept.

“I figured that with technology I can make the model autonomous, meaning no employees on site,” Silberman said.

He added, “When I put those constraints over my thinking pattern, it kind of naturally yielded PingPod, which are these small format, PingPod locations that you can spread all across the city, so that every neighborhood has a local place to play.”

To test out his business model, he brought a pingpong table to Canal Street in June of 2019 for two weeks. This was his minimally viable product, or MVP, which is a version of a product that has just enough features that it can be used by customers who can then provide feedback for future product development.

The pop-up test revealed that many people wanted to play pingpong right off the street and were willing to pay up to \$20 to play for a few minutes. Silberman ended up writing a report on the findings of his MVP, which is how he met Ebuén and Kogler.

PingPod caters to beginners and casual pingpong players who want to play on weekends. “A huge portion of our customer base are people who are by no means competitive,” Silberman said.

The table tennis startup’s impact in New York City extends beyond simply creating a community of pingpong aficionados.

“In the Lower East Side, we drive hundreds of people every week to PingPod and then afterwards they are hungry,” Silberman said. “They go across the street, and they pick up King Dumplings.”

Reflecting on PingPod's success in New York City, Silberman credits his team for raising brand awareness by connecting with the table tennis community.

"It's like an onion," Silberman said. "We're at the very center, but then every layer kind of replicates that. People join the community and become just as enthralled as we are and they're able to go out and tell their friends about it."

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