

Business Stories

Prosperity Brownies

Demand has increased and the company now has a raft of new contracts including its first export order. In 2010 turnover is expected to be three times the 2007—2008 figure.



Background

Paul and Jane Hatcher launched Prosperity Brownies in 2005 after being persuaded by friends that their chocolate brownie-making skills could be turned into a money-making venture. Made with chocolate chunks and fresh fruit, and free of e-numbers and preservatives, Prosperity Brownies got off to a flying start, selling at farm shops and cafes across the south east. Just two years later the company was named Best Sussex Food Producer at the Sussex Food and Drink Awards.

The challenge

The market for the company's brownies was limited as they were mainly sold individually, unwrapped, or packed in fives in a simple plastic wrapper which did not allow the product to be seen. Expansion depended on the ability to significantly prolong their shelf-life with the help of packaging that would also reflect the premium quality of the product. The key to that expansion came when Paul made a presentation at a seminar on innovation in April 2008.

"Paul brought along a selection of brownies for us to sample and this led to a discussion about trying to extend the shelf life of the product," said Business Link regional innovation adviser Mark Barber. "With this in mind I introduced him to SEEDA's Food Technology Enterprise Hub in Leatherhead and I also set up a meeting with Designing Demand, the Solutions for Business programme developed by the Design Council, funded by SEEDA and delivered by South East Design. With their support the company has since gone from strength to strength."

The response

Design Associate Gavin Pryke was assigned to Prosperity Brownies and he helped Paul and Jane to kick-start their design projects.

"Gavin was great at 'walking' us through the whole process and mapping out the business, highlighting the internal and external perspectives," said Jane. "After we'd thrashed out the way forward he introduced us to a number of design agencies and we chose to work with Brighton-based Ape Creative."

Ape relished the challenge of finding a solution that would accurately complement the natural qualities of the product.

"We had the logo to work with but wanted to embellish the packaging with messages that reinforced the premium, ethical and fun nature of the brand," said Ape's Paul Spirou. "We sourced 100% recycled material and used uncoated paper stock. Careful use of colour then meant that the boxes for all varieties could be printed together, increasing cost-effectiveness. The cut-out in the box lid shows off the brownie and we feel that, in every respect, this understated packaging really does justice to a great product."

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► The outcome

Paul and Jane are delighted with the results of their investment in the Designing Demand programme, which was further helped by funding from the Manufacturing Advisory Service. “The shelf life of our brownies used to be around 10-12 days,” Paul said. “The Food Hub has now given us 30-day approval although we actually mark them at 21 days. This has made a huge difference to our potential marketplace”.

Demand has increased and the company now has a raft of new contracts, including Budgens, Co-op stores, National Trust shops and Waitrose in the south east. Prosperity Brownies has also had its first export order, supplying to the Parisian equivalent of Fortnum and Mason, Grande Epicerie De Paris. The business anticipates employing a further two members of staff in the next 12 months and the 2010 turnover is expected to

be three times the 2007-2008 figure.

“It seems that the packaging has also changed the perception of the product,” said Paul. “ A Brighton retailer who has been selling our brownies for some time has seen sales increase five-fold, with some customers saying the brownies are even better than the previous ones, despite being assured they are identical!”

Now Paul and Jane, who donate 10% of all the company’s profits to the Viva Network, a children’s charity, are working hard to expand their customer base still further. They have also added a new product to their range, and are already supplying their ‘Prosperity Jacks’, an individual flapjack embodying all the premium qualities of their brownies, to Waitrose in the south east.

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