

PURE GENIUS



Dean Legg decided to tackle a teen skin condition by creating his own natural face cream. Such was his success, the 25-year-old launched skincare brand Pure Chimp and has his sights set on a global market. Louise Cummings talks business.

Pictures by Warren Gunn



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ancel the next series of *The Apprentice*: we've found Lord Sugar's high-flying candidate. Meet Dean Legg, entrepreneur extraordinaire. Like empire-building Sugar, who was selling photographic film to friends in the playground and boiling beetroot for the local greengrocer as a boy, Dean was making ready cash by selling various wares on eBay while he was still at school. And he sold his first company for a not-too-shabby £3,000 at the age of 23. Not bad eh? Though with Dean's plans for a bulging portfolio of businesses, we're not convinced the 25-year-old would remain an 'apprentice' for very long.

"I've always had this desire to have my own business. My dad runs his own company selling special displays for airports, shopping centres, that kind of thing. I'd seen him doing well, so maybe that influenced me, but I think it's just been in my nature to want to be an entrepreneur," he smiles, sipping a cup of green tea – a little clue to his current healthy venture. "I've always watched *The Apprentice* and *Dragons' Den*, and used to buy lots of things from the pound store then sell them for an inflated price on eBay." Smart, you see.

The picture of health, with the clearest of complexions, you'd never know that Dean suffered with chronic acne as a teen. "I had terrible skin and tried literally everything. It was so bad I got put on these tablets by the doctor that were really strong, and I had to go for blood tests every week, so it was pretty full-on," he recalls.

Not wanting to be drug dependent long-term, Dean decided to try to heal his skin from within. "The tablets were the only thing that worked but when I stopped taking them, the acne would come back, and they were too dangerous to be on for a long time. So I decided to change my diet and use gentle skincare products to get on top of the situation."

Embarking on what he calls a 'clear skin diet', Dean cut back his dairy and sugar intake and swapped to low GI foods. And in search of a soothing remedy to treat his skin, he began experimenting with lotions and potions in the kitchen of his Huntingdon family home, using nut oils and butters, crushed flowers and natural extracts. The organic approach worked, and as Dean's complexion and general wellbeing improved, the seed for his first business was sown.

"I was at Anglia Ruskin at the time doing a degree in business management so I knew what was needed to launch a business. I'd been in Sweden for five months as part of my studies and they're very into natural products out there, so that

sparked the idea of a 100 per cent natural skincare business," he explains.

The savvy student began researching the market, went back to the mixing bowl, and commissioned a chemist to check the viability of the moisturisers and serums he was concocting. He also applied to The Big Pitch, an Anglia Ruskin-associated scheme, which gives undergraduates and postgraduates with imaginative business ideas the chance to compete to win up to £10,000 funding, starting with a one-minute video pitch and progressing through various rounds. "I got to the final, but didn't get any money. It was a good experience though," Dean adds magnanimously.

Despite the lack of funds, he managed to raise enough capital to launch Purely Natural, boasting a 25-strong product range. "There were moisturisers and creams for dry skin, blemishes and all different skin conditions. I ran the company for about two years alongside my degree," he explains. "I just had a laptop and worked from home, made the products here and I sold through a website. It cost about £3,000 to establish, which was quite low compared to most companies. After a while, I realised I couldn't upscale the company as I already had so many products so I ended up selling it to a man in Birmingham for the same price. So I didn't make a profit but I learnt a lot."

business bug

With £3,000 burning a hole in his pocket, Dean was all set to jet off in search of fun and adventure in Australia, but the business bug within soon bit. "I'd got my visa sorted and everything, but for some reason I decided to invest the money in another company; I just couldn't help myself. I think it's in my blood!" he laughs.

Sticking to what he knows, Dean went down the natural skincare path again, but this time restricting his product range to allow for expansion down the line, and adding a new string to his bow – green tea. "I used to go a bit crazy over caffeine but it affects your hormones and acne is a hormonal thing, so I switched to green tea. It's great stuff!"

Coming up with the quirky name Pure Chimp and adding a cheeky-but-charming chimp to his branding "to give it a fun edge", Dean's business has been in operation for around eight months. "This time it's more about getting people to combine the natural skincare products with a good diet too. I've got a brilliant drink, Matcha green tea, which I've called Super Green Tea. Essentially, it's green tea turned into a powder so you actually drink the leaves; it has 137 times the antioxidants of regular green tea and gives you



a real energy boost." he enthuses, taking another sip of his rejuvenating brew as if to prove it. "There is caffeine in it, but there's another ingredient which means you don't get the anxiety that people often get from caffeine intake, and it's more of a steady release so you energise for longer throughout the day. I like it with a spoonful of honey," he smiles.

As for the skincare, there's a Super Face Cream featuring rare hemp seed wax to nourish skin and unblock pores; a creamy Super Cleanser, infused with kaolin clay; Super Body Cream with rich shea butter and unique banana extract; and Super One, an oil bursting with juicy ingredients such as hemp, safflower and sunflower to reduce inflammation.

And to complement the Japanese Matcha green tea, as part of the wellbeing arm of the enterprise, there's a Super Powder with spirulina, which is great for boosting the immune system and ridding the body of toxins.

"The range is 100 per cent natural and features some great ingredients, such as rare banana extract. A lot of essential oils can aggravate your skin but this is quite unique; there are 26 known allergens and it contains none of those, so it's great for sensitive skin and we thought bananas went hand in hand with our chimp logo too."

Though still a fledgling, the feedback for Pure Chimp is positive. "No one has a bad word to say about the tea, everyone loves it and they go on to buy it again and again. With the skincare, customers have told me it's helped to alleviate skin conditions like eczema and acne, so that's great. My family are big advocates too; my mum, grandma, even my dad! Me and my sister take the tea every day so it's definitely got the family thumbs up," he adds.

Dean isn't one to rest on his laurels, so it's no surprise when he tells me he is already in talks with a Cambridge manufacturer to make his products, has a new soap being made and is planning to launch a separate company with a friend just to market his 'wonder tea'.

"It's such a brilliant product, I think it'll be quite easy to upscale the green tea, and I've just had someone take on my skincare range in Singapore, which is really cool," he smiles. "You can't beat getting the sales, that's the best feeling."

Looks like that trip to Oz may have to wait a little longer yet . . .



• Find out more about Pure Chimp and order products at purechimp.com. The Super Tea is £16.95 for a 50g jar, and the skincare starts at £11.95 for the Super Cleanser, with various multiple-buy savings available.