

All we want for Christmas...

Many young, entrepreneurial businesses rely on strong sales during the festive season for a prosperous new year. For the 2013 *Director* Christmas Present Guide we brought together entrepreneurs who hope their niche products will be the best gifts Santa puts under your tree this year...

Photographs **Jay Brooks**



INTERVIEWS: HANNAH BAKER, RICHARD DUNNETT AND BEHVE HASSANI; MAKE-UP: SHERIE WARWICK



Mark Latter

WEMAKE4YOU (ON ETSY)

“I’m a book designer by trade but I chose to diversify into selling personalised prints in September after years of producing them for friends. My art includes illustrations of family pets and themes for Christmas, christenings and birthdays. Personalised word art is popular; customers send me a list of a family member’s hobbies or traits and I email them a selection of ideas to choose from. I sold four times as many prints in the second month as the first and to keep start-up costs low I sell through Etsy – it takes 3.5 per cent of each sale but I plan to launch my own website next year, as sales increase.”

Prints from £10 (unframed)
www.etsy.com/uk/shop/wemake4you

Henry Hales

SIR PLUS

“After leaving university, I wanted to set up a business and thought retail would be a safe option. I spoke to shirt makers who explained that the leftover material from shirts is often used to make boxer shorts. It gave me the idea of buying surplus fabric and creating cool clothes such as waistcoats and knitwear. I launched the business in 2010 with a small loan from my mum. I am now involved in a start-up incubator and with Start Up Loans. I have doubled my sales year-on-year and, in 2014, I will need to recruit two people – a buyer and a marketing specialist. It’s a huge step for me but it’s really exciting.”

Lambswool or cashmere jumpers
 from £50

Amelia Rope

AMELIA ROPE CHOCOLATE

“I was a practice manger at a doctor’s surgery and, out of frustration, I applied to *MasterChef*, and I got on the show – twice. In between both shows I took a five-day chocolate course in Verona and I started playing with ideas. In 2012, a friend convinced me to make chocolate bars and I dropped some off to the buyers at Selfridges and Hush, who then became my first clients. My turnover doubled from year one to year two and, at the moment, my sales are doubling year-on-year with wholesale, and trebling year-on-year with online. It’s the most rewarding thing I’ve ever done in my life.”

Chocolate bars from £5.60
www.ameliarope.com



Adison Clark Rudall

P&CO CLOTHING

“ My business partner, Lee Timms, and I launched our t-shirts in March from our base in Birmingham. I worked in IT and Lee was a student but we had a flair for design and felt there were no clean-cut menswear brands. Each of our designs has a story behind it. We invested £1,000 each and sent 100 t-shirts to fashionable people including the band Bastille – who were photographed wearing our designs – and the model Ricki Hall, who we’ve teamed up with to launch a collection. This exposure, and appearing at PopUp Britain, has helped quadruple sales since the start of summer.”

T-shirts from £20
www.pand.co

Eleanor Stuart

ELEANOR STUART

“ While interning at an events company, after graduating in 2012, I was commissioned to design a set of nine Alice in Wonderland plates for the *Daily Telegraph's* tent at the Hay Festival of Literature and the Arts. After that, I started thinking about selling my work. I'd heard about PopUp Britain through Twitter – they told me they loved my work and suddenly my [British-made] plates were on sale in their store on London's Piccadilly. The business is largely self-funded. I've also attended a Prince's Trust business course and I have a mentor. By the end of my first year, I hope to turn over £10,000.”

Alice in Wonderland plates from
 £37

Jezz Skelton

MANGO BIKES

“ While at university, I wanted a good quality bike but I couldn't find anything in my price range. I got Ben [Harrison], my business partner, involved and we launched the company in August 2012. The parts are manufactured in Taiwan but we design everything ourselves and the bikes are hand-finished in the UK. In our first full trading year (August 2012 to 2013) we turned over £350,000 and in 2014 we're on track to turn over £1.5m. We took on a £100,000 enterprise finance guarantee loan from Lloyds to buy more stock and this Christmas we are launching our first children's bike.”

Custom-made bikes from £295
www.mangobikes.co.uk



Jules Quinn

THE *TEASHED

“While studying fashion marketing at University of Northumbria I was sent on a work placement. One lunchtime, they sent me to Sainsbury's to buy more tea for the office and I noticed that the tea aisle was quite small compared to coffee. I saw a gap in the market for a more premium tea, something younger and fresher. So I used my final-year project to create The *TeaShed and used my student loan to start paying for the business. On 16 May, 2011, I launched straight into Fenwick in Newcastle and, to date, we have sold over one million teabags. Most of our business is in winter because it's so cold!”

Tea from £3.49
www.the-teashed.co.uk

Joseph Sepher

JOE & SEPH'S GOURMET POPCORN

“In 2010 I was making some popcorn and I forgot to put an ingredient in. I threw in the extra ingredient and recooked it. That's when I discovered flavour layering – the foundation of the business. That October, I took the popcorn to the BBC Good Food Show and, within two hours of arriving, we sold out. When we launched we only had six flavours – we now have 40, including mince pie. We're stocked in Selfridges, Harrods and Harvey Nichols. The business is growing fast – our first year's turnover was £100,000, growing to £400,000 last year and this year it will be £1.1m. I hope to reach around £2.5m in 2014.”

90g standard popcorn pouch £4
www.joeandsephs.co.uk

Jeremy Cooper

BONE AND RAG

“When my partner, Alex Sullivan, and I got our first dogs we couldn't find any comfortable, stylish but hard-wearing dog beds. We made our own and started the business in 2010, diversifying into collars, leads and pewter bowls, handmade in Rochdale, Brighton and Sheffield. Shortly afterwards, while walking the dogs, we met Annabel Foxley, who liked the products so much she bought into the business. We are achieving a 30 per cent annual growth, selling through our website and to independent shops. And having a stand at the PopUp Britain event in London over the summer gave us great exposure.”

Collars and leads from £35
www.boneandrag.com



Kim Lewis

MILA FRAGRANCE

“My husband’s grandfather started a company trading in essential oils in Vienna in the 1920s but had to flee due to the Nazi threat. My niece Emily and I wanted to build on that family history. We wanted a contemporary twist on the oil blending so we hired a perfumer and started mixing essential oils. We launched in November 2012. We’ve worked very hard on producing luxury products, so they make a really special gift. This is our first Christmas of trading and we’re hoping it will bring us new customers. In the first 12 months we projected £20,000 of sales and we will look to double that in year two.”

Candles, bath oils and diffusers from £35

Alistair Callender

GATE8 LUGGAGE

“As an IT consultant and frequent flyer, I realised there was no single-solution piece of hand luggage that met the needs of the business traveller who makes one-to-three day trips. In 2010, I designed a foldaway wardrobe for garment storage with a zip-off laptop bag on the side that, when combined, doesn’t exceed carry-on measurements. I spent £5,000 having samples made and another £25,000 for the initial order. We sell through our website, independent department stores and at exhibitions. Last year our turnover was £82,000. This year, we are seeing a 30 per cent sales growth, due to all-year-long advertising.”

Cabin bag and zip-off laptop case, £149

Sion Edwards

WARNER EDWARDS GIN

“Tom Warner and I are from family farms and we wanted to use the assets we had for a new business. One idea was to produce essential oils from lavender for which you need a still. While the crops are growing, the still is sat doing nothing, so we decided to use it to produce alcohol. After three and a half years of planning, we launched a gin. We have turned over £140,000, to date, but this Christmas is really important because it’s our first. We’re really pleased with our growth for a small company, with only two guys running it, and hopefully next year we’ll be able to keep on growing.”

Gin from £33
www.warneredwards.com