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## LIVE WEB CHAT: AMELIA ROPE

### *The chocolatier answers your questions*

This week's **lunchtime masterclass** is with Amelia Rope, owner of Amelia Rope Chocolate Ltd, a luxury chocolate line stocked by Selfridges, Liberty's, Wholefoods and Fenwicks.

Amelia set up her own chocolate business after attending a *Les Bonbons de Chocolat* course at legendary chocolate manufacturer Valrhona in France.

She began her company, **Amelia Rope Chocolate Ltd**, with just £7,000 in funding raised between family and friends (having been refused a loan from high street banks).

She grew the business from an initial commission for 1,000 bars to a range of 13 bespoke bars and boxed chocolate cubes supplied to department stores and independent stockists both in the UK and further afield.

Amelia is fascinated by the kaleidoscope of flavours found in high quality chocolate and its history, from the cacao traditions of the Aztecs and the Mayans to the evolution of chocolate houses in Europe. Her business aims to highlight the importance of top end chocolate, as opposed to cheap, highly processed products.

**This web chat is now live - come join in, in the comments section below**

Tags: business, advice, web chat

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### CHAT

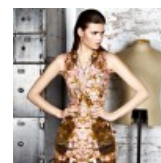
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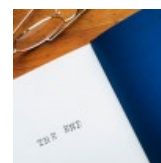
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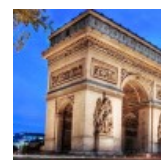
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**Claire**  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 13:00  
BST

**Training and qualifications**

Hello there, What a fab idea this is.... Please could Amelia share more information about what she did before discovering she wanted to become a Chocolatier and what previous training/qualifications? Or was her course in France enough? How did Amelia make her first ever chocolate bar? In her own kitchen or in a factory/lab? Basically all about the early days... Oh and has she ever considered making a solid easter egg?

**Nicholas**  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 13:18  
BST

**Sensual powers of chocolate**

Is it true that chocolate has aphrodisiac qualities or is this an "old wives tale"? I live alone but hope one day to find happiness and believe that quality chocolate might be the help I need. Thank you.

**Jess**  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:00  
BST

**money**

Hi Amelia - I'm interested in how you went about raising funds for your own business? £7K is quite a lot to drum up! did you have business proposal etc.? and did you consider getting the backing of an angel?

**Georgia**  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:00  
BST

**Shelf Life and suppliers**

Hi Amelia, I am also really interested in your early days. How did you find your suppliers and also how did you work out your shelf life of your products? Do you source directly for your cacao or do you go through distributors here in the UK? How did you first approach retailers?

**Stylist admin**  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:00  
BST

**Welcome to today's web chat with Amelia Rope**

We're joined live online by luxury chocolatier Amelia Rope, owner of Amelia Rope Chocolate Ltd. Amelia is here with us until 2pm today so get your questions in now...

**Amelia Rope**  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:01  
BST

**Hello**

Hello to you all - I will hopefully manage to answer most of your questions - here goes!

**Carey**  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:03  
BST

**chocolate**

what's the difference between good chocolate and really great chocolate? Is it all in the cocoa bean?! xxx

**Amelia Rope**  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:06  
BST

Hi there Claire

Well my story is quite a long one - so will try and answer as much as I can and keep it short

Before I had ARC - just to give you an idea ..... I was a PA, qualified aromatherapist, studied herbal medicine & nutrition, oh yes sold mouse traps for a day, worked in a pub, waitressed, Practice Manager of a doctors practice & a few other things too

I have never had time to train - constantly propelled from one thing into another. Training is always good! I just wouldn't have created my unique chocolate dipped flora if I had been trained. Every chocolatier would say yikes - moisture from the flower, storage, prevention of blooming etc. I started off with flora, then truffles that I made in my kitchen using a marble slab and doing it the Juliette Binoche way!

Something special for Easter next year I promise Claire!

**Aria**  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:06  
BST

**pitching**

I make bespoke hats and I really want to start pitching them to big department stores. The problem is, I am really nervous at public speaking

## YOUR VOTE COUNTS



The AW12 trend that makes your heart skip a beat:

- Leather
- Brocade
- Heritage print
- The colour purple

and stuff like that and I have no idea how to go about it - I fell like my pitching skills will let my product down. Any advice? how did you get the endorsement of places like Selfridges?

*Amelia Rope*  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:08  
BST



**Nicholas**

Hi there Nicholas

Dont rely on chocolate - get out there, live your life and see what happens! Chocolate contains tryptophan & phenylthylamine but only a small amount which could say it is an aphrodisiac. Anything which makes you feel good is good for the soul!

*Emma W*  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:09  
BST

**Big name retailers**

I think my question is slightly similar to Aria's. Any tips on getting your foot in the door with big name retailers like Liberty and Selfridges?

*Amelia Rope*  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:10  
BST



**Jess**

Hi there Jess

Well £7k was the easy bit - I emailed friend and family and away I went. I am pleased I set up my business with the bear minimum as it has meant every penny has had to make a penny. It makes you really look at what your business needs and you have minimal wastage. Now I would love a stodge of cash!

Dont let not having finance put you off or limit you - but do make sure you have an idea which can attract some or make some.

*Nicholas*  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:10  
BST

**sensual powers**

you're right and especially if you have to use those long medical sounding words just in the hope of a cuddle - so soul food it will be. Love your recipes

*Amelia Rope*  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:13  
BST



**Georgia**

Hi there Georgia

Sourcing my suppliers..... I usually 'rout' them out just by keeping my eyes out for things. I am hot on 'pure' ingredients and avoid any 'natural' flavourings.

At this stage I dont go direct cocoa farmers. It is something I would like to do when I have more time.

Shelf life - you use labs and I have a good technical team to advise as well.

*Amelia Rope*  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:14  
BST



**Georgia**

Oops I forgot - many of the retailers have approached me as I have little time to approach them.

*Sophie*  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:14  
BST

**Initial commission**

Hi Amelia, How did you go about getting the initial 1,000 order commission with no stockists? Or did you have the product ready and then go with venues with stocks? x

*Cara*  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:15  
BST

**Marketing**

Hi Amelia, I've seen your products online and in magazines and have always been very attracted to your products. I'm currently trying to set up my own creative business and the trouble I have is taking it up a level so I'm reaching the right audience and getting regular rather than occasional custom. In your earlier days, how did you make the transition from your friends' and family seeing you as 'interested in chocolate' to getting press and getting enough custom for it to be a full time business? Thank you so much, Cara

*Amelia Rope*Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:16  
BST**Carey**

Hi there Carey

Good chocolate is more than a good cocoa bean, it is the stages of harvest, fermentation, drying, roasting and care. You can have a good bean - its what you do with that good bean - treasure & nurture it and value it or not!

*Georgia*Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:16  
BST

Thank you kindly for your answers. What is the size of team that you have working for you creating the chocolate and do you make it in a factory or private kitchen?

*Amelia Rope*Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:17  
BST**Aria**

Hi there Aria

Firstly dont be nervous. Believe in your product, your skills and GO FOR IT. Sometimes you will get doors shut but other times they will open and they will open wide. Have in your mind who you want to target and then approach them.

*Amelia Rope*Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:19  
BST**Emma**

Hi Emma

You need to have an excellent product, your costs & pricing worked out. I didnt approach Liberty and it was a huge honour they approached me. With Selfridges (where I launched) I dropped off my bars for Ewan Venters (then Director of the Food Hall) and thought nothing would come of it. It did.

Focus on building the brand and creating sales and who knows where you will end up?

*Amelia Rope*Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:22  
BST**Sophie**

Hi there Sophie

I had my chocolate company up and running and was making the truffles and crystallised flora. Both with short shelf lives and a nightmare to send in the post in those early years.

I was very lucky. Patrick Reeves (co founder of sofa.com) said to me to make a bar and I said how dull. So Patrick being Patrick put in a commission for 1,000 bars to get me focussed and off the mark with them. He paid me with 1,000 bars which I then had to go out and sell to convert to cash. Which I did hence bringing in my first milk bar after and onwards. He gave his 1,000 out to sofa.com customers and still does to this day! What a honey he is!

*Leila*Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:25  
BST**choc travel**

Hi Amelia Please don't tell me you get to go travelling and check out chocolate plantations at the same time? that would be brilliant...

*Amelia Rope*Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:27  
BST**Cara**

Good question - in the early days it is down to your family and friends to 'spread the word' and buy the products. I am a great chatterer (as my poor family, friends and business colleagues know to well!) and wherever I go I end up chatting about chocolate. I also would drop samples off for specific occasions and give a ton for presents to everyone I came across (now I am mean as anything!). I went out there and sold too - sending samples to delis (the first one I started to supply Elizabeth King now Bayley & Sage still sell my bars!). You start creating sales and spreading the word. Everyone wants something new to write about and new products . Get out there, get your story out there.

*Amelia Rope*Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:28  
BST**Leila**

In your dreams Leila. When I do yes it would mean travel. For the sake of growing my business every hour and penny went back in. I went to my beloved Bahia for a week in January - my first week's holiday in 4 years!



I dream of travel believe me!

*Tessa*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:30  
BST

**business idea**

Where did you get the idea to become a chocolatier from? were you influenced by Juliette Binoche and co.? thanks!

*Amelia Rope*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:30  
BST

**Georgia**

Hi there Georgia



I hate the word factory - it makes me shudder! In the early days the person helping make them was definitely a chocolate kitchen. I now have team making them in a production unit.

*Marsha*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:31  
BST

**web chat**

Hi there Amelia what kind of chocolate do you like to eat on a day-to-day basis? and is chocolate really good for you????

*Kiddi Clobber*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:34  
BST

**Getting help from friends and family.**

When did you know you were ready to start approaching the big boys to stock your brand and how much of an influence/help did your friends and family really have on helping start out (apart from helping you raise your start up capital? Thanks and congratulations to you to x

*Rosie*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:34  
BST

**tips**

Hiya. what are your top three tips for succeeding in business

*Amelia Rope*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:37  
BST



**Tessa**

Hi there Tessa

If you had said I would end up with a chocolate business I would have laughed and said no way! I always wanted my own business. When I was 'little' I used to sell my pony's manure at the end of our drive for cash (until someone nicked the cash in the tin!), cooked for my parents, set up a waitressing company as soon as I passed my driving test and could nick my ma's car.

Chocolate came about by accident really. I had been on 'Masterchef' and was asked to go back to compete again the following year. As I ended up in tears on the first one I was determined to not let a tear seep out and feel a fool for the 2nd one so went part time in my job as Practice Manager and went on various courses - one of which was a 5 day immersion at Valrhona. This just completely bowled me over as I realised chocolate was like wine and coffee (never drunk a cup of tea in my life so not sure with tea!). The way that the quality of it was down to where the cocoa grew, how it was looked after, processed and then all the different %'s, different tastes produced by the different beans etc. I still though wanted to be a food journalist at this stage so wrote to an Editor of a food magazine. He saw me and tasted one of my truffles I had made from chocolate mint in my ma's garden and said this is it chocolate.

I then went on to create my crystallised flora which had a phenomenal response in the press, tv, radio and well chocolate it was! It made me realise keep an open mind with what you end up doing.

Having been overweight in my teens and 20's the thought of a food business made my stomach curdle!

*Amelia Rope*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:38  
BST



**Marsha**

Hi there Marsha

I admit I eat a lot of chocolate and on a day to day basis snack away on mine - hence I need to drum up some new flavours (one very close to being made) to keep my tastebuds happy!

Chocolate is it good for you - well I believe almost anything is good for you but..... in moderation!

*Amelia Rope*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:38  
BST



**Rosie**

Hi there Rosie

Determination

Focus

Belief

Good question!

*Carrie*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:40  
BST

**chocoalte**

I would love to set up my own chocolate business! Is there money in it, do you think? what are your ideas to grow the business going forward? thanks so much!

*Amelia Rope*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:40  
BST



**Kiddi**

Hi there Kiddi

I am a bit of an all or nothing individual and always want to be at the top (I am competitive purely with myself noone else).

The Food Editor suggested I contact Selfridges and so I thought nothing to lose, all to gain and to get on and do it.

I did.

I would never in all my dreams have thought I would be selling in the stores I do. I also think it is important to mention smaller retailers as they are really key to building a business too.

*Sharon*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:42  
BST

**funding**

Hello Amelia - as you went to banks with no luck, would you suggest against getting a bank loan to back a business? do you think banks in general need to do more to back small business, in line with govt policy (or at least what they say)?

*Amelia Rope*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:44  
BST



**Carrie**

Hi there Carrie

I believe you need to enjoy what you want to do, live with it, sleep with it, breathe it. If you do then there is a chance you will succeed. Is there any money in it? Well I have to live and support myself and I want to push it as far as its potential will take it - then one day I might make what I call money.

I have given up a lot to do it and have never been so fulfilled in all my life - that in itself is worth a lot.

Cocoa is a commodity and the prices go up and up and they will continue to do so. There is a limit with the consumers spending power - especially at the moment. Go for it but look at it all in depth if you really want to get out there. It is a saturated market and you need to have a USP. Which you will have as you are you!

*Tilly*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:45  
BST

**chocolate business**

What other chocolatiers inspire you? e.g. Rococco, Godiva etc.? and how important do you think packaging is to the whole process? there's obviously a fine line between looking good and being eco-friendly, where do you stand on that? Phew. sorry for influx of q's!!!!

*Amelia Rope*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:48  
BST

**Sharon**

I feel very strongly about what little is done to support small businesses in the country. I have a fab MP Priti Patel who actually got me a meeting with



Vince Cable several years ago. We are the backbone of the economy.

The banks ..... well if you are fortunate to be offered a bank loan, feel confident you wont fall into a lot of debt if your business is unable to pay it back and you feel you dont need any input from a backer at this stage - take it. It means you hold onto as much equity as you can and in the early stages this is key.

At the moment my big 'bug bear' is the postal increase. I have campaigned to Priti Patel and also my local MP in London (I am now based up here). These increases with no notification will effect small but growing online businesses like mine.

I would like the government to meet people like me, listen and support in a positive way. I will not give up campaigning. I nearly didnt have my business and yet had a confirmed order from Selfridges and hush.com to cover the amount I wanted to borrow from them. Crazy!

*Amelia Rope*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:52  
BST

**Tilly**

Hi there Tilly

I dont really watch what other chocolatiers are doing otherwise I would panic probably! Inspiration to me I get from people, colours (especially mosaics and stained glass windows), shapes and architecture, aroma and just random things.

Packaging - yes I think packaging is important. Two ways - it should reinforce the product and brand (I aim for simple but sophisticated with a hint of luxury - who know if I achieve it?) but also is going to grab the consumer to go and pick it up, look at it and hopefully buy it. When you are new I think packaging is important to give a USP.

If mine was all about packaging and not taste I would have to stop!

*Sophie*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:52  
BST

**production**

Hi amelia, I'm interested in how you go about the logistics of chocolate production. How big is your team and do you recruit interns? How does one get into chocolate making? thanks a lot xx

*Joanna*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:54  
BST

**tasting**

Do you do tasting sessions to spread the word? and hold special events?!

*Amelia Rope*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:54  
BST

**Sophie**

Hi Sophie

To begin with I worked from a kitchen I had in Borough. A huge expense and one I let go of. I now have a small team who make the bars for me. I am looking for an intern but on the business side rather than production.

*Sanaa*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:55  
BST

**Publicity**

Hello Amelia. I run my own cupcake business based in Devon but my problem is drumming up publicity without spending too much cash. At what point would you say it's worth investing in this? do you need an outside PR?

*Amelia Rope*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:55  
BST

**Joanna**

Hi Joanna

The only in store tastings I do are for Liberty, Selfridges and Wholefoods. I enjoy them as it allows me to meet my customers, hear their feedback and get to chatter away too!

I dont do any special events as such.

*Ruth*

Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:57  
BST

**small business**

Just caught you chatting about small business on Twitter. are emporiums

the key do you think? as in small businesses getting together to support one another (although it's competition).

*Amelia Rope*  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 14:58  
BST



**Sanna**

Hi Sanna

I did all my own PR until last May when I took a team on Samphire to help me.

I am lucky as I have a 'story' - all of which is genuine (!) and really have just I dont know built up relationships with journalists, appreciate everything they do and they get thanked/bribed (!) with choc parcels and also networked (loathe that word but brain running out of energy!).

PR has to pay for itself in my mind. I still do a lot myself in that I write my own interview answers etc. and have a very strong focus on where I want to take the brand and in which printed matter etc. Its a tough one.

I recommend my Samphire girls!

*Amelia Rope*  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 15:00  
BST



**Ruth**

Hi Ruth

Small businesses I think need to work together, to unite and form a 'body'. Competition - I dont see other small businesses as competition. I see that we are all needed to help the economy and therefore we support and unit.

*Stylist admin*  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 15:00  
BST



**That's all the time we have for today**

Thanks for all your questions! A big thanks also goes to Amelia, for all her brilliant insight and advice. You can see more about [her company here](#)

*Amelia Rope*  
Added: 05 Apr 2013 - 15:01  
BST



**Thank you**

Thank you Stylist magazine hugely and thank you all for your questions. Thank heavens I have been a PA and so can type fast! Hopefully I have made sense too!

**ADD A QUESTION**

Name \*

Comment \*

**SUBMIT**



*Unusual UK wedding venues*



*One giant leap for womankind*



*The great multitasking myth*



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