Go the distance with a one-trick pony

by Jonathan Moules



If you are trying to launch a new product-based business, your most difficult task is likely to be finding a buyer. If you already have an established business, it's probably getting paid by customers. Mandy Haberman managed to solve both these problems at a stroke. She came up with a clever design for a non-spill child's drinking vessel, called the Anywayup Cup.

She hawked a prototype cup around 18 companies, from pharmacy chain Boots to baby-bottle manufacturer Avent. However, no one wanted to buy from a company with a single product. 'I walked around with my prototype in my bag for about a year,' she says.

The solution came about by accident. A couple of entrepreneurs suggested that she try to market her idea at a baby-products trade show. 'We went with the intention of just gauging interest, but took £10,000 of advance orders,' Haberman explains.

The positive reaction to her product was all the more remarkable given that the choice of show had actually been a mistake. Haberman had been advised to attend a show called The Nursery Fair, but booked one called Nursery World, which was aimed at childcare providers and nursery managers. 'I made a complete cock-up,' she admits.

However, the error proved to be the making of her business because it put Haberman into contact with people eager to buy her product in significant volumes. 'We were mobbed,' she recalls. The order money gave her the seed capital she needed to start manufacturing.

The Anywayup Cup is now sold worldwide, generating annual sales of about £40m. Haberman licenses the product to five companies, netting her up to about £1m a year. Now that the Anywayup Cup is a 'mature' product, Haberman only expects to make between £250,000 and £500,000 this year. However, she is putting this money into developing a new range of products.

Haberman's selling tip for product-based businesses is to try and find something that will grab someone's attention. It is notoriously hard to get a meeting with buyers at large retailers – and even harder to achieve a deal. Haberman's tactic was to send one of her Anywayup Cups filled with Ribena* in the post, with a message to the recipient that if the item arrived still full, then the product had worked. This tactic worked on Tesco's** buyer, Haberman says.

At a meeting with another buyer, she decided to grab his attention by throwing her Ribena-filled Anywayup Cup on his desk. The fact that the cup did not burst open all over his in-tray did not turn into any orders. 'It wasn't that he wasn't interested. It was just that he didn't talk a number that was acceptable,' Haberman says.

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