

Howling



Leila Wilcox and Ivan Massow field sales calls

letters from parents saying, “Thank you so much, my son has suffered from open sores or eczema, and it’s cleared up.” There was no alternative that they could afford, and we’d given them that option.’

Of course, many mums may have pondered, ‘Why isn’t there something affordable and free of chemicals that I can use on my children?’, but they didn’t have the time, inclination or drive to go out there and do it themselves. Leila did.

And it was her mentor, Ivan, who saw the potential in Leila and encouraged her to see it, too.

‘Ivan taught me so much,’ says Leila. ‘A lot of business skills – how to handle different meetings; but he also taught me some good lessons about myself. I always used to see myself as a victim, because I was a young mum with no qualifications,

and he made realise not to see myself like that. He got me to see my full potential.

‘As women we tend not to think big enough. So we just need to start thinking big.’

Blue-sky thinking

And it is that big blue-sky thinking that has propelled Halos n Horns to such success.

‘With our products we could have just started off selling them online and then in organic pharmacies, but instead we went, “Hell no, let’s go to the biggest retailer and sell them in Tesco’s.” Why not? We had so many people along the way who said, “You won’t be able to do this” and we’ve proved them all wrong.

‘We sold a million units into the

supermarkets, which was absolutely amazing. If we can do it on such a small amount, anybody can.’

So what tips does Leila have for other small businesses trying to get distribution deals in supermarkets?

‘You’ve got to bear in mind that they have 500 people a week contacting them, and it’s a lot of work for buyers to add a new line. So, point out how distributing your product will benefit them directly and add value; not just what they can do for you, but how you can help the buyers. We found that has worked well.

Never give up

‘The other thing is to not give up, just hassle them. If they were a boyfriend, we’d have been done for stalking! We really didn’t give up, so every time you get a knock-back, find another route in, another excuse to ring them.’

Other obstacles have included unsuccessful meetings with Somerfield early on, but that led Ivan to his decision to devote his time to the business, which has been great for Halos n Horns.

‘There’s nothing we regret doing because it is a learning curve and everything is a learning tool. So you don’t see the obstacles, you see the opportunities. If something goes wrong, learn from it.’

And with business being such as it is, things can go wrong. Halos n Horns may have landed a dream contract with Tesco, but that was no easy ride. Ivan and Leila had to produce a massive 200,000 bottles of shampoo for Tesco, costing £40,000 of their own money. Then, just 24 hours from delivering their first batch of shampoos to Tesco, Ivan and Leila discovered some of the bottles were leaking. After checking, as many of the

Leila’s top tips

What are your tips to small businesses on sales negotiations?

- Go in with a strategy. Really sit down beforehand and work out what your strategy and angle are going to be and how you’re going to approach it.
- Every single time someone tells you that you can’t do it, use it as a bonus, as something to make you that bit more determined, that bit more driven, and prove them wrong.
- Keep smiling and come out with what you want and don’t come out with something you don’t want. Persistence with a smile! ❖