

The SMELL of success

By SIMON READ

JUST like Archimedes, Leila Wilcox had her Eureka moment at bathtime.

And now, two years on, that flash of inspiration has become her Halos N Horns brand of children's toiletries - on the shelves of 1,600 supermarkets across the UK.

"It started with my son Troy's eczema," says Leila, 26. "It was very difficult to find a product we could use in the bath that didn't flare it up.

"The products we could use were very expensive and difficult to track down. I realised there was a demand for a chemical-free range of toiletries that are affordable and easy to buy."

Leila, a former actress, had been in car sales before Troy, three, was born but decided she wanted to take control of her own life.

With absolutely no experience in manufacture or marketing, she went out and started asking questions.

She found the names of manufacturers and set up meetings with around 20 to get an idea of what could be done.

She did the same with packaging companies and soon knew the costs and whether her product range would be viable. Next Leila started asking questions of potential customers.

"I discovered it's important not to be scared to ask questions. After approaching companies to find out how practical my plans were, I did some market research which proved crucial," she explains.

Leila's approach was simple. She went to where her potential customers were and asked them if they would buy her product. She stood outside M&S, Woolworths and Tesco and approached parents with young children.

"I asked them what they bathed their children in, were they concerned about chemicals, and how much they were prepared to pay for products," she says.

"Parents told me their kids wanted bright colours and strong smells - which hadn't been part of my thinking at all. I had planned a fragrance-free, clear range."

Leila used her newly gained knowledge - and car sales skills - to negotiate deals with suppliers. It meant she didn't need to find a lot of cash to get her business off the ground.

"I borrowed £15,000 from my nan and I found companies that were prepared to deal with me," she explains. "I don't believe you need a lot of money to start a business. People use that as an excuse."

With what she thought were the right products, Leila began approaching supermarkets. Tesco was the first to bite and agreed to try her range in some of their stores. In August 2005 her Halos N Horns baby bath first appeared on the shelves of 120 Tesco superstores.

"I never dreamt we would get that



You don't need lots of cash to get your ideas off the ground

she," admits Leila. But that was just the beginning. Her next big move was appearing on Channel 4's *Make Me A Millionaire* in the autumn of 2006. "I met entrepreneur Ivan Misner, who became her business partner. With his support the business really took off and Leila's dream of creating a nationwide brand started to become a reality. Realising she needed extra help to cope with demand for her range, she called in outside experts. Leila approached a sales and marketing company to help with distribution.

HALOS N Horns uses natural cleaning ingredients and plant-derived conditioners all of which are hypo-allergenic and score one of the highest kind-to-eyes ratings seen by the test laboratories.

The range is Halo Baby Bath, £3.49, Zingy Orange Hair And Body Wash, £2.99, Melon Mango Oilyhem Shampoo and Conditioner, £2.99, Berry Malt Shampoo and Detangler, £2.69, and Toothly Bubbly Toothpaste, £2.29. For stockists call 01202 780558.



WATER BABY: Troy and, left, his mum Leila