

Our one-to-one with Jo Malone!



Jo lives in London with her husband and business partner, Gary, and their son.

We opened Jo Malone halfway through a recession and it could have gone either way. A recession gives you more options in a funny sort of way, because people are more willing to take a chance on you. You can negotiate good deals with rent and be a little cheekier in terms of what you ask for from suppliers. There's not the same choice of consumers out there, so what have you got to lose?

We succeeded because we offered something that made people feel good at an affordable price. Of course, we still made mistakes. People only saw this phenomenal rise in growth. What they didn't see was decanters exploding because we had filled them too full; a whole batch of skincare products going mouldy; labels smearing; the computer and till system going down; me not realising in the first week of trading that people had to sign credit card slips – we lost £10,000 because of that.

Gary had left his job and we had enough rent to last nine months and that was it.

Fragrance queen Jo Malone, who survived breast cancer and sold her business to Estée Lauder, tells Victoria Young about her new role as a TV business mentor, and advises two woman&home readers

We took on the leasehold of the shop for five years, so if it had gone horribly wrong, that would have hurt both of us. But the gamble paid off. It's really important to listen to your gut instincts in business.

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2003 and I'm five years all clear, but having cancer changes everything about you. You start living very much for the day and the moment and you don't say, "I'll do that tomorrow". I suddenly had this feeling of wanting to do something else; I felt there was another chapter in me. I sold the business in 2006. I felt it was the right time to do it. I'd given Jo Malone the very best I could. I don't miss being hands-on, but I miss designing fragrance terribly.

The whole idea of my new TV show came from me having a cup of tea with one of the directors of the production company. I made a comment that the only way out of this recession is to create new businesses. I wondered if I could help people build their businesses. Before I knew it, the BBC had commissioned the show! And the process of making it has brought back the spirit of me.

I was very young when I first started out in

business, and I suppose I did try to be all things to all people. Eventually, you get to a point when that makes you miserable. The best piece of advice I've been given is, "Be yourself, not something that someone thinks you should be." It came from a buyer, a woman called Rosemary Bravo.

The other piece of advice I live by came from Oprah Winfrey after I went on her show. She said, "Own everything you do". She meant, make sure you stamp your soul and your spirit through the centre of everything you do. That has really stayed with me.

I've learnt not to take things personally, although that's an ongoing process. When people say, "This isn't personal", it can be very easy to think, "Yes, it is!"

I don't know what's next. I've loved nurturing people and their businesses, and seeing their lives really transform, and I'd love to make more TV shows. But I'd also love to think there was another chapter of fragrance in me.

Jo's show, High Street Dreams, will air at 9pm on BBC One from 19 May for four weeks.

What I know now that I wish I'd known then

Don't be in a rush to do everything at once. When we launched our skincare line, we did it all in one go when really we should have done it product by product. That was a mistake. I had faith in the products, but each one could have been a different story and had a different angle, and instead I gave everything away in the beginning.



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Jo with w&h readers Joanna McGivern (left) and Debbie Carter (right). Turn over the page to read the helpful business advice she gives them. >>

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JOANNA MCGIVERN, 38, was previously director of a travel PR consultancy in London. She launched The Handpicked Collection (handpickedcollection.com), a website selling gifts and lifestyle products, in 2007. She is married with three children.

everything feeds back into them. Training is important – I’m not underestimating that, but if you make people feel valued and they feel part of your dream and part of your vision, then they’ll go that extra mile. We were always very inclusive and non-hierarchical, and anyone could offer ideas about the company and the brand. I would also advise you to sit in your call centre and work alongside your staff for a few days. You’ll learn about the consumer, but also, when people see you working alongside them, they’ll say things to you that they probably wouldn’t in a meeting.

How do you stay original when other people copy you?

JO When you’re leading the way, people do copy and that’s part of life. But if I’m honest, you haven’t yet got a product that is original. Perhaps as your business moves on, creating your own original product might be something you do. You make it original and different by creating a lifestyle – environments that give people ideas and inspiration; that will make

example. Don’t be scared to try new things – failure is an important part of business.

Another way to make a business original is by stepping in with your personality and saying, “This is what I would do”. People love to mimic someone they admire and receive personal advice. You’re not just selling a product, but a dream and a lifestyle too. My husband always asks, “How can we add value without adding cost?”

How do you keep the day-to-day running without losing sight of the bigger picture?

JO This is where maintaining a team and building a family is so important. It’s your job to be the visionary. Meanwhile, you need people you can trust with the day-to-day running of the business. My key person was my husband, but I also had Charlotte, who looked after my PR and still works for me – I’d trust her with my life.

You also need to have regular time with your team of core people, where you look at the future. But you’re the one that has got to take hold of it, to spearhead it. Aspirational people produce inspiration for

Can you help me take my business to the next level?

How do you ensure everyone understands the company’s DNA and cares about it?

JO When you grow a business, you’re at the top. You are like a little family, so let everybody feel they have a voice. When we started Jo Malone, we used to bring all the company together regularly, sometimes to have dinner because it isn’t just about work and it’s worth making things enjoyable. Make sure everyone is looked after, and know the names of their kids and husbands or wives. Celebrate birthdays and when you hit your targets, celebrate those too. You don’t need a big party – just get a pizza and a bottle of wine, and share the moment together.

As we expand the brand, how can we retain our core values?

JO If staff can see you practising your core values, they will too. Make sure they know why you have core values; that they are not just about the way that you behave, that they’re about the product, they’re about PR and about your marketing. Make sure

people think, “I want that”. For example, if you’re selling a grater, include a recipe.

In a catalogue, it’s always worth thinking, “How could I make this different?” Maybe you could have themed issues of your catalogue or part of one of your catalogues dedicated to weddings, for

others. And some of the greatest ideas don’t cost a fortune. Invite people you like and whose opinion you value to a dinner party. Tell them that you have ten questions about your business you want to put to them. You’ll get brilliant feedback and hopefully have a nice night. >>



Devising a successful business strategy

Joanna’s verdict

“Jo was very inspiring and her advice was great. My business is still quite small and I have a fantastic team, but I have always worried that if I had more staff it would be hard to maintain the same sense of belief in the business, plus pride and attention to detail. Jo made me realise you don’t need to lose your business’s core values if you grow. I’ve already followed up on one of her suggestions, which was to send flyers to our customers in between catalogues, with some recipes and decoration ideas for a summer party, plus a handful of relevant products. My meeting with Jo left me feeling really excited about the future.”

How can I get more funds to grow my company?



DEBBIE CARTER, 47, launched Chocolate Craft (chocolatecraft.co.uk), a brand of chocolates, in 2005. She is stocked throughout the UK in shops such as Harvey Nichols, sells through her website and runs chocolate-making workshops. She is divorced with two children.

So far, I've funded the company myself. How do I attract investors?

JO Do you really need an investor? An investor will bring another set of opinions. Only hand over equity as a last resort. I would say grow more slowly and retain control – or else go to the bank. Banks are lending again – and you can pay the bank back, retaining control.

If they say no, knock on another door. If you go into business with friends and family, though, make sure there is a legal, rather than a verbal, agreement. Relationships change and, that way, everyone is sure of the boundaries.

One solution can be to subcontract the manufacturing of the chocolates, which is a way to avoid investing too much money in equipment and premises. You need to establish that you have a good business before investing too much. Subcontracting

doesn't need to affect the quality – when I first took my bath oil to a manufacturer, I stood there and made it with them until I felt satisfied that they'd got it.

What's the best way to grow my brand? I've been approached by Waitrose, but have shied away because I don't want to compromise product quality when fulfilling bigger orders.

JO Why not be completely honest and open? Tell them you like the idea but have questions about how you'd provide enough chocolates, and ask if they can trial them in three or four stores that are local to you. They wouldn't necessarily be thinking of putting your product in every store straightaway. That said, if they want to know how quickly you can turn a big order around, then you need to have answers.

Secondly, ask yourself, what is your dream? Is it to have chocolate shops all over the world? If so, then this supermarket may not be right; they may not fit into your vision. Sometimes you need to walk away from a great offer because you know you'd be compromising your long-term goals. Are you starting a business – or are you creating a brand?

I want to promote our Chocolate Workshops, but have very little money for PR. How can I spread the word?

JO Well, an opportunity like this helps! When I did a piece with woman&home several years ago, I was overwhelmed by people wanting to buy my products, so my

advice is to be ready. People often create PR, but then are not ready for the results.

In order to attract press, you need originality. The bottom line is that you are selling a box of chocolates, so you have to create a passion, a hunger and some intrigue around it. Are there flavours, for example, that are unique to you?

I am not remotely computer literate, but you need to take advantage of sites like Twitter and YouTube to keep everyone informed. I've always done PR in-house, rather than use an agency. You employ seven people – is there anyone who may have a flair for PR? If not, could you take someone on part-time? Send handwritten notes and a box of your chocolates to people you think could help – physically get the product in people's hands. Above all, listen to your consumer. Ask them what they think; take their feedback and make it your own.

Debbie's verdict

"Before I met Jo, I had been thinking about the possibility of getting outside investment to expand. I'm reaching a stage where I need to move into bigger premises, but after listening to her, I've decided to carry on, on my own, growing steadily and modestly to avoid financial debt, and to focus on developing a loyal customer base and maintaining the quality of my product." w&h

Jo samples Debbie's chocs

