



Shasta The Way Babies Like It

Entrepreneur Ann Marie Durkin has moved quickly from a niche she carved out for sterilised baby soothers to developing and manufacturing an exciting new product

Ann Marie Durkin from Granard, Co Longford, is a good example of someone who has spotted a gap in the market for a product and turned it into a viable business. Durkin's eureka moment for her firm Shasta, which markets a number of baby sterilisation products, came when she had her first child. She explains: "I set up Shasta at the end of 2006. I had a premature baby and I needed sterilised soothers. When I went to buy one I found that there wasn't one available. I spotted the gap and decided to go for it."

Durkin's first product, Steri-Soother, was the world's first pre-sterilised ready to use baby soother. Steri-soother comes sealed and bacteria-free, eliminating the need to sterilise the soother for first-time use. Shasta's product range also includes Steri-Orb, a battery-powered portable soother steriliser which can sterilise a soother in six minutes, and Shasta stainless steel Baby Bottles, which the company imports and rebrands.

According to Durkin: "Our current products are sold mainly through pharmacies and independent stores in Ireland and the UK. Trade fairs have been great for building sales. I went to various fairs in the UK and through them I was able to make great contacts. The Harrogate Nursery Fair is particularly good. In September this year I went to the Kind + Jugend trade fair in Cologne, which is the biggest baby and toddler fair in the world. Everyone who's anyone in the business was there so I was able to arrange a lot of meetings and make a lot of contacts."

Steri Ova is the latest product to be developed by Shasta. Billed as the world's first portable baby bottle steriliser, Steri Ova is patented in Ireland and patent pending in 140 countries. According to Durkin, the product is 16 times faster than using steam, which is the main method of sterilisation in use today. Shasta is now poised to launch Steri Ova worldwide.

Durkin, who trained as a teacher, has been banking with AIB in Longford since the start of this year. Durkin explains: "I'm quite a new customer but was introduced to my branch manager at the National Women's Enterprise Day in Mullingar. They have been very encouraging and supportive about my business and my ideas."

Shasta is based in the Midlands Innovation and Research Centre at Athlone Institute of Technology. Steri Ova was developed, prototyped and tested in collaboration with the Materials Research Institute and the Bioscience Research Institute at AIT. Nypro Healthcare will complete the final phase of development and will manufacture the product.

Building The Brand

Durkin is focused on building the Shasta brand and the company plans to launch what Durkin believes will be a game changing product. "We're currently putting the finishing touches to what will be the world's first portable baby bottle steriliser. It will be able to sterilise a bottle in 30 seconds. Normally it would take between



Ann Marie Durkin, founder of Shasta

eight and 15 minutes. It's a very lightweight product and is getting a lot of interest from both global distributors and large retailers. This is going to be the flagship product that will really launch the Shasta brand," says Durkin. Good design is very important to developing the Shasta brand and Durkin has used the services of Principle Design Consultants in Dublin for product, packaging, point of sale and website design.

Manufacturing the bottle steriliser will require substantial investment by Shasta. According to Durkin: "We're currently completing a fundraising and we're also looking at partnering with another company. The company is supported by Enterprise Ireland and we've also had excellent support from the Midlands & West Enterprise Programme at AIT."

Shasta has availed of European Investment Bank funding, through AIB. The European Investment Bank loan is available at a discounted rate of AIB's variable base lending rate plus 2% and is repayable over a period of between two and five years. SMEs can use the funding to finance investment in their business and to develop ideas.

According to Durkin: "AIB saw the opportunity and was willing to fund the company at a crucial stage of our development."

Talk to the SME team in your local AIB branch today. Click on www.aib.ie/business or call 1890 47883.

AIB Top Tip:

When developing an export plan, analytical research in your potential market(s) and attendance at trade shows (similar to Harrogate Nursery Fair) is a critical enabler.

Collaboration with 3rd level academia on the design, look, feel and functionality of the product will validate your proposal and authenticate your product/service features.

The European Investment Bank Loan Fund which is currently available from AIB is a very attractive offering for SME's (subject to lending criteria and guidelines) who wish to invest in the development of their business or fund new product research and development to drive the business forward.

We in AIB are very keen to support entrepreneurs and help you to develop your ideas into successful and viable businesses. Lending criteria, terms and conditions apply. Allied Irish Banks p.l.c. is regulated by the Financial Regulator.