

LESSONS IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Identity chip

Stuart Read and Nick Dew on creating a successful product identity

One of the problems Stacy and Mark Andrus didn't have when they started down the entrepreneurial path was how to spend an enormous marketing budget. Six figures into debt, their efforts were simply focused on generating more cash than they spent from Stacy's D'Lites, their pita-wrap sandwich pushcart, in downtown Boston, Massachusetts. From that modest start in 1996, the pair managed to build one of the hottest brands in the US snack food market today without using traditional marketing programmes, or even spending much money along the way.

CRUNCH FOR THE CRUNCH

A pushcart is a small piece of retail real estate – sufficiently small that the Andruses could not meet demand for Stacy's sandwiches during the busy lunch hour. The line would form, and hungry people at the end would eventually disappear. So one evening, Mark cut up the day's leftover pitas, toasted them with seasoning, and handed them out to encourage people to wait and buy a sandwich. People liked the sandwiches but they loved the chips! From that success, two things were born. The first was a company named Stacy's Pita Chips. And the second was the company's unconventional marketing approach.

NATURAL MARKETING

Marketing for Stacy's Pita Chips has reflected the founders' identities from the start. Both had worked in restaurants, so taking care of guests – even



Mark and Stacy Andrus formed a unique relationship with their brand

when they are waiting in a line – was a natural thing to do. Committed to healthy lifestyle, the Andruses produced a low-calorie snack product using natural ingredients and baked wellbeing into the brand. And in case the intimate connection between founder, product, company and brand wasn't clear enough, they put Stacy's name on the door, and on the packages.

A TASTE FOR PROMOTION

As they developed Stacy's, the Andruses did not do much traditional advertising. They are their brand, so instead of television commercials, they gave away chips in person at trade shows, events and grocery stores. Their website is a consistent reflection of the pair as well. Information about the company and products are accompanied by healthy recipes featuring Stacy's Pita Chips, photos of the team, and every page features a hand-drawn caricature of Stacy herself. The approach worked so well that in 2006, when the Andruses were selling US\$60m in chips a year,

PepsiCo's massive snack food division offered to acquire Stacy's. Though owned by PepsiCo today, Stacy's operation still operates independently, still maintains the original brand identity, and distributes its pita chips to all 50 states in America.

BRAND NEW

If you have an appetite for starting a new venture, it is useful to appreciate the relationship between the brand you create, the company you build, the products you offer, and you. If there is a consistency between them all, communication comes naturally. Each element reinforces the others. Together they create an identity, tell a story to customers, partners and employees, and help you generate awareness and business at a time when you need it most. ●

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