

Former teacher and mother-of-three Azra Sadiq, 39, returned to England in 2011 determined to be her own boss after living in Saudi Arabia for ten years

Name of company: Azra Chocolates, an online retailer specialising in hand-made chocolate shoes.

Started trading: October 2012

Who are your customers? People looking for unique chocolate gifts for women.

What did you do before? My background is in finance, but I taught maths and English in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, for ten years.

Did you have to retrain? Always a keen cook, I taught myself the art of tempering chocolates, then trained with master chocolatiers in Belgium and the UK.

What drove you to set up your business? A passion to combine my interest in chocolate and fashion while working for myself.

What made you confident it would work? The reaction from friends, colleagues and family.

How much did you invest? All my savings.

What has been your greatest triumph? Winning Dragon's Den star Theo Paphitis's small business award in May 2013. This led to me being featured in the national press.

How did Enterprise Gateway help? It helped me gain access to a wide range of workshops, tutorials and knowledgeable mentors, supporting me after the business was launched too.

What has been the most important thing you learnt? Nothing is impossible if you put your mind to it.

How do your working hours compare? Longer than in teaching. I'm constantly working on production, admin and marketing and my mind is always on the business.

What was your biggest sacrifice? Giving up a regular income. But hopefully I will be rewarded as the business grows.

What are the best and worst bits about being your own boss now? The best is having the freedom to do what I want without needing to



Chocs away: Azra Sadiq

consult others. On the other hand, I cannot simply switch off.

Where do you see your business in ten years' time? I would like to have a range of chocolate shoes and favours in high-end retail stores across the world. Maybe one day I'll collaborate with major fashion houses to turn their artistic shoes into chocolate art.

What advice would you give someone setting up their own business? Have a unique selling point.

How successful have you been so far? We sold 350 shoes, as well as chocolate wedding favours, in the first year and we're now hoping to triple that. We're not making a profit yet – hopefully next year.

■ W: azrachocolates.co.uk; T: 07773-160-630

'Be patient – it takes time to grow'

Former forensic scientist and mother of two Alison Brodie, 47, has developed her own specialist sports moisturising cream

Name of company: Brodie Skincare (BSc), a producer of specialist sports moisturising creams

Started trading: November 2012

Who are your customers? Anyone who likes to exercise, from Olympic divers and Ironman triathletes to those who have just love how our cream makes their skin feel.

What is your career background? I was a forensic scientist for more than 20 years.

Did you have to retrain? I took courses in making natural skincare products and cosmetic legislation.

What drove you to set up your business? Redundancy.

What made you confident it would work? Pride and belief in the product, customer feedback and spotting a niche in the market for sports moisturiser, combined with the post-Olympic increase in people taking up sports. The Tour de France in Yorkshire is another major opportunity.

How much did you invest? To date £21,000

What was your biggest challenge? Setting up the website.

How did you tackle this? I found an amazing copywriter and my ex-boss produced the website.

What has been your greatest triumph? Being stocked in Up & Running's Harrogate store. I won a Theo Paphitis's small business initiative award on the same day.

How did Enterprise Gateway help? They provided basic common sense advice with short modules covering different topics and could answer questions and point me in the right direction. You also meet other people starting out.

What has been the most important thing you learnt? To ask for help. Lots of people are

willing to provide advice and support for free.

How do your working hours compare to those in your previous job? I work much longer hours and constantly think about the business.

What is the biggest sacrifice you have had to make? The security of having a regular salary to pay the bills: we had a very frugal Christmas this year.

What are the best and worst bits about being your own boss? Working from home can be lonely and challenging, but I save hours not travelling. When you make a mistake, it's your money and I can be hard on myself, but sometimes you need to give yourself a pat on the back.

Where do you see your business in ten years' time? I'd love to employ staff and have a local laboratory with a full range of products.

What is the one piece of advice you would give someone setting up their own business? You have to love what you are doing. But be patient, it takes time to grow.

How successful have you been so far? It's going really well. We have sold more than a thousand pumps of our Recovery Phase cream, with many repeat customers, but we haven't made a profit yet as we are ploughing everything back into the business.

■ W: brodieskincare.co.uk; T: 07934-113939



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