

Partnerships

Anna Mackenzie and Lucy Wright

The childhood friends fell in love with muesli on a school trip to Switzerland and, after graduating from university, developed a recipe now stocked in more than 1,500 stores including Selfridges. Here's the growth story of Cuckoo Foods so far...

Vital stats

Business Cuckoo Foods
Founded 2013
Staff Three full time
Sector Food manufacturing
Turnover Anticipated turnover for 2016 is £400,000
Location Manufactured in Carmarthenshire, with an office in London
Co-founders' background Lucy Wright studied fine art at Newcastle University while Anna Mackenzie studied business and psychology at Edinburgh

Anna Mackenzie When I was at university, trying to find an on-the-go breakfast to take to the library was quite difficult. At the supermarket, outside of a croissant or plain yoghurt, there wasn't anything really healthy, filling or tasty. When I went home that summer, my mother was in the kitchen making recipes for bircher muesli [a dish of rolled oats, dried fruits and other ingredients first developed around 1900 by Swiss physician Maximilian Bircher-Benner] and I thought they'd make a really good on-the-go breakfast.

Lucy Wright At the end of that summer we were talking about our plans and Anna shared this idea with me. I've always wanted to do something in the food industry and we started working on it as a project. After a few months we made a decision to keep going with it, rather than do something else.

Anna Mackenzie We got loans from family but didn't really know where to begin. So we put our heads together and thought, 'Let's contact other food businesses also at start-up stage – but stocked in retailers so more established than us – and ask them for advice.'

Lucy Wright We made a list of the brands we admired, but no one that was directly conflicting with us – Propercorn, Pop Chips, and Joe & Seph's popcorn to name a few – and nervously made the first call. We were really overwhelmed at how responsive all of the brands were and each one gave us their time and led us onto another person.

Anna Mackenzie We organised tastings for friends and family to establish the most popular flavours and then started doing this in offices to get an unbiased opinion. We then began to look for a manufacturer by calling dairies and

visiting them. We really just threw ourselves at as many people as we could and asked for advice – it got the wheels going.

Lucy Wright We were so delighted with how helpful everyone was and we are still very good friends with them all. What's so nice about this industry is everyone helps each other – there's a real tribe of disruptive start-up brands, so we all look out for each other and help where we can.

Anna Mackenzie When it came to the pitching process, our strategy

“**We made a list of the brands we admired (but that weren't conflicting with us) and rang them for their advice”**

Lucy Wright

was to just be really persistent. Buyers are inundated with new products so we'll always make sure we've done thorough research.

Lucy Wright We'll send a presentation and follow it up with some samples. We'll then wow them with our story, and what we can offer their store or outlet.

Anna Mackenzie The harder work starts once you're on the shelf. So if you're already focused about how your product will look best on the shelf, you're going to make your work a lot easier.

Lucy Wright Our roles in the business came about naturally, as we have very different strengths. We're similar in terms of sharing the same values and we usually agree on everything. I look after sales and account management and Anna looks after finance and operations. In terms of marketing, I look after trade marketing and

Anna looks after the consumer side.

Anna Mackenzie In the first year we did absolutely everything together, and then we realised it's not the best way to spend our time. But by that stage we had already taken on the two different roles so it was a very natural progression.

Lucy Wright Our working relationship is brilliant – people always ask us if we've ever had an argument. The honest truth is that we haven't. If we disagree we'll just sit down and talk about it. We also socialise outside of work and try not to talk about business!

Anna Mackenzie But we don't really go out socially just on our own, because we see each other all day – so it's usually with our other girlfriends and we're pretty good at not talking about work.

Lucy Wright I think having separate roles helps; on a day-to-day basis we work very closely together but we have different things going on every day as well, so we're working pretty independently.

Anna Mackenzie We've learnt so much since we've started. I don't think we'll ever be complacent and think that we've finished learning.

Lucy Wright We have so many ideas for new product ranges. The dream would be to walk into a supermarket in five years' time and not just see our bircher muesli on the shelf but see all our other ranges around the store.

Anna Mackenzie All of our ideas are around the theme of on-the-go snacks. Really innovative, on-trend ingredients and flavour combinations in line with our bircher muesli range. That's what ties all of our ideas together. ①

To find out more about Cuckoo Foods visit cuckoofoods.co.uk

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