

Ask SCORE for Business Advice

“Ask SCORE” Column

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Nutorius Nut Confections thrive for Green Bay women By Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt

While many are enjoying the sounds of chestnuts roasting on an open fire, two local women are celebrating the success of another type of nut.

Carrie Leibhauser and Jennifer Gille are owners of Nutorius Nut Confections (www.nutoriousnuts.com), a start-up that is seeing extraordinary success.

"It's crazy, just crazy," Leibhauser said. "People are excited for us, and we can't go anywhere without being asked about our nuts."

Founded five years ago, Leibhauser and Gille started with a simple idea to create a nut confection that had unusual flavors and zero trans fat. They started by mixing flavors in a home kitchen and did sampling in the teacher's lounge at their children's school. Before long, they were producing their product at The Farm Market Kitchen in Algoma, a regional shared-use food processing business incubator.

The interesting flavors were given catchy names like Ooolala Original, Cherry Vanilla Vavoom and ChaCha Chipotle, and the pair began marketing. Leibhauser said they always envisioned a larger market, and instead of marketing to local businesses, focused on a broader area.

"We started with the fancy food shows in San Francisco, New York and Chicago where retailers come through and sample the product," she said. "The response was almost immediate. We knew we had a good product, but we wanted to make sure we could meet production demands."

Growth has been carefully measured to ensure that orders can be filled in a timely manner. Nutorious was first marketed in specialty shops, and independent brokers were contracted to handle sales. Leibhauser and Gille originally did the packaging, but have rebranded twice to carefully define the brand. Most recently, they hired Burnham Richards to do a brand study and redesign the logo, packaging and collateral materials. It's an expense that Leibhauser said has paid for itself many times over.

"When you're a new business, you're always watching your expenses," she said. "We say we aren't going to do anything new, and then a few days later, we're looking at spending \$8,000 for new plates and dyes for production."

As the business grows, she said that it's tough to reach a balance between cash flow and spending that is necessary for expansion.

And, growth seems certain.

Orders are now coming in from Sam's Club, Mill's Fleet Farm and other national retailers. Cranberry Orango Fango and Blueberry Lemon Meringue have been added, and new flavors are being developed. Nutorious has received numerous national awards, including most outstanding snack and most innovative product. The product is now being distributed internationally, and sales have tripled the last several years.

As Leibhauser looks back on the past five years, she is seeing a product idea turn into a success story.

"We started out with a plan to create a product with simple ingredients and big, unusual flavors. It helps that when you eat it, you can't help but to say, 'Wow.' The flavors just mix," she said.

Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt is co-owner of DB Commercial Real Estate in Green Bay and assistant district director for SCORE, Wisconsin.