

# START-UP *stories*

in association with



## REAL *views* business perspectives

### Get the most out of trade fairs

Trade fairs offer exhibitors important marketing opportunities, making up a vital part of the overall marketing mix, alongside PR, advertising, social media and direct mail.

In an increasingly digital age, exhibitions are the only medium where buyer, seller and product physically come together, but what makes for a successful exhibitor? First, it is crucial that you choose the right event for you. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this exhibition aimed at your target audience?
- Is this a consumer or trade exhibition (that is, do you want to make business contacts or meet the buying public)?
- Does the exhibition have a track record of success?
- Has the footfall increased year-on-year?
- Are the organisers promoting the exhibition? Be it PR, media sponsorships or advertising, promotion is essential to get a healthy amount of traffic on the day.

Make sure you have your senior staff at the event. If you are an owner-manager, try to attend yourself or have your top salesperson or manager present to drive the sales and make sure people are getting expert advice on products and services.

A lot of people hire young casual staff for exhibitions, but this is a big mistake. It is your best staff members who will create product sales.

Clevamama and Baby Elegance, exhibitors at the SMA Know-How Pregnancy & Baby Fair, have their top people – managing directors and chief executives – present on the day. Both always sell out, enjoying a very successful



Jennifer Shaw and Claire Finnan

show. Take advantage of promotional opportunities.

Many fairs will allow exhibitors to sponsor certain aspects of the show to gain brand exposure. Think of everything you could possibly sponsor and then ask if you can do it. Does the fair offer a sponsorship spot for the goody bags? Can you put a small sample of your product or promotional literature in each one?

Create an eye-catching display. Your exhibition stand is the shop window for your business. It should be adequately branded and decorated to promote and sell your product or service.

Use simple direct advertising to outline what your product or service does. Make sure that you and your display stand out from the crowd, especially at a larger exhibition, where you might have ten direct competitors just a few metres away. Try to come up with something that will attract attention and encourage people to stop and talk to you.

Engage with the exhibi-

tion organisers early on. Form a relationship with them and their PR team to ensure your brand is in the mix for any promotional activities.

The media is always on the lookout for strong case studies when covering a consumer fair or trade exhibition, so have plenty of good high-resolution photographs, product information and company biographies to hand.

Self-promote. Use your website and blog, and post on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn, to promote the event and connect with other exhibitors.

Remember, the networking opportunities an exhibition offers are just as valuable as any sales you might potentially make on the day.

Claire Finnan and Jennifer Shaw are managing directors of Huggy Bloom and organisers of the SMA Know-How Pregnancy & Baby Fair, taking place in Dublin's RDS from April 13 to 14 and Cork's City Hall from April 20 to 21

## Waterford start-up offers quality control for pharma products

By Elaine O'Regan

Savvy start-ups would do well to keep an eye on the growing outsourcing trend in the Irish pharmaceutical industry, according to the founder of a new Waterford venture offering essential quality control services to the sector.

Louise Grubb's company Q1 Scientific opened its doors at Westside Business Park on the Old Kilmeaden Road late last year, creating four jobs. The idea behind the €500,000 facility was, she said, to create the highly specific storage conditions needed to stress-test the durability of pharmaceuticals under development – to determine their shelf-life, in effect, before they hit the market.

Grubb already has one pharmaceutical signed up to the service, and has six environmentally-controlled storage chambers up and running. By the end of the year, she hopes to double the number of chambers rented out to up to ten customers on a pay-for-use model. If her plans come to fruition, it would mean four more quality-control jobs for Waterford.

Q1 is not Grubb's first foray into the pharmaceutical sector. In 1999, she established NutriScience to manufacture nutraceuticals for horses and small animals. It was acquired by Belgian firm Eucophar a decade later. NutriScience makes dietary supplements and treatments for conditions associated with joint mobility and muscular ailments.

While Grubb no longer owns the company, she is continuing in her role as managing director on an ad hoc basis while she establishes Q1, and she does not intend to stop there.

"I really enjoy the start-up phase of a new business, so I'd hope to continue identifying new opportunities and setting up new ventures," said Grubb, who rates as her most impor-



Louise Grubb: 'Starting a business requires all your focus and, looking back, it was the truly fun time'

SHANE O'NEILL

tant professional move the decision to give up a "permanent, pensionable job", to establish NutriScience at the turn of the century.

"I had been trying to get it started in my spare time, and it

wasn't until I cut the safety net that I could dedicate myself 100 per cent," she said. "Starting a business requires all your focus and, looking back, it was the truly fun time."

Grubb believes Q1 Scientific

has the potential to become a "major outsource partner for the pharmaceutical and life science companies in Ireland", but maintains that there is "no magic ingredient" for starting up a successful business – "just

### Q1 Scientific

**What it does:** stability storage facility for pharmaceuticals

**Why it works:** "Tenacity is the essential component for any business to succeed. There will be opportunities and threats, but if you keep focused on doing things as best you can, then you will be in a position to recognise and seize the opportunities that arise" – **Louise Grubb**, founder and chief executive, Q1 Scientific

a good idea that you do better than everyone else and some serious hard work. Tenacity is the essential component for any business to succeed," she said.

"There will be opportunities and threats, but if you keep focused on doing things as best you can, then you'll be in a position to recognise and seize the opportunities that arise."

## A novel and efficient way to combat flooding

By Tina-Marie O'Neill

In the past three years alone, Ireland has been hit by four costly weather-related disasters, including two severe freezes in January and December 2010, and floods in 2009 and again in October 2011. The collective cost in damage and insurance claims is an estimated €892 million.

"The country is in recession, and local councils don't have the resources to provide people with sandbags. Each householder in a potential flood area is responsible for providing their own flood protection," said Tom O'Kelly, who set up Ekosax in November 2011 to distribute self-inflating flood defence bags.

"We have won a number of contracts with Croke Park, Aviva and a few stud farms nationwide, but we are on a campaign to raise awareness among homeowners about our product.

"The general public is still being advised to buy sandbags or fill their own pillowcases with earth to protect against flooding. There are more efficient, easier and cleaner ways to protect your home or business."

The Floodsax was invented by British entrepreneur Richard Bailey, who originally invented Blastsax, an easily



Tom O'Kelly: 'Each householder is responsible for providing their own flood protection'

MAURA HICKEY

portable alternative to sandbags for use by the British army's bomb disposal personnel while preparing detonators. He then applied the same idea to the civilian and domestic market by creating Floodsax.

The 200 gram sacks come vacuum-packed in boxes of 20, which can be stored under the stairs or in the garage. The bags' semi-porous inner liner contains a gel, which absorbs water to become taut, weighing 20kg within three minutes. Floodsax.ie has videos of the product in action.

O'Kelly set up the distribution business after the recession claimed his custom-made furniture business, Kelco, which he had run for almost 20 years.

"Setting up a new business after the heartbreak of closing Kelco down hasn't been easy, but we are getting there," he said. "Introducing a new product to market is exciting, but also frustrating. We have experienced a series of severe natural disasters in the past few years, and they have been sudden and largely unpredict-

### Ekosax.ie

**What it does:** Irish distributor of Floodsax – lightweight, water-activated, self-inflating flood defence bags

**Why it works:** "The Irish Insurance Federation estimated the cost of the October 2011 floods at €127 million, €58 million of which were household claims and €69 million in commercial property claims. Having Floodsax at hand gives people a serious chance to save themselves and their properties in the event of a flood." – **Tom O'Kelly**, Ekosax director

able. A box of 20 Floodsax costs €200 plus €6.50 for delivery.

"People might think that's expensive, but not when there is water rushing through your front door and you're looking at doubling the cost of your annual home insurance," said O'Kelly.

"Floodsax are designed to control the damage, and to buy people the time they need to move their loved ones and valuables to safety."



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