

Rude Health, making healthy choices as delicious as possible

As part of our quick founder questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Camilla Barnard, cofounder of Rude Health about elevating healthy eating, the meaning of "rude health" and committing to alternative milks.

Temps de lecture : minute

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What was the catalyst for launching Rude Health?

We wanted to make healthy eating desirable. This was back in 2005 when eating healthily meant diets and bran, lots of hunger and no fun. Having lived in Japan and spent time in France and Italy I had seen first hand that it's very possible to eat food that's nourishing and delicious and enjoyable.

So when I was at home with two tiny children I was doing a lot of cooking and feeding, and not working, in the career sense of the word. It was a neighbour who suggested mixing up a truly delicious muesli, which became The Ultimate Muesli that started the business.

Tell us about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

We make alternative milks and cereals that make healthy eating a

celebration not a sacrifice. The ultimate aim of the business is to make it possible for everybody to be in rude health – which is an old English expression meaning up for life and full of energy. Food plays a huge part in how we feel, and I firmly believe it's more than the nutrition element. Enjoyment is crucial. We don't absorb nutrients when we're stressed and one of the biggest indicators for poor mental health is the number of meals we eat alone. So we make nourishing and nutritious food, and we focus on the taste and enjoyment of consuming it.

Living a life in rude health has been the way we've reached customers for most of our 18 years. From wild swimming and bog snorkelling to the Rude Health Rants at Abergavenny Food Festival, we've aimed to inspire people and encourage people to eat well and enjoy it. This year we have stepped up to increase our reach and are running an above the line poster campaign.



How has the business evolved since its launch?

The biggest change was choosing to make alternative milks in 2013. We didn't realise at the time that they would become the heart of the business. All we knew was that people were having alternative milks with our cereals and the versions that were available at the time didn't taste good, had a long list of dodgy ingredients and came in ugly packaging.

It felt like we had to make our own.

They were an immediate hit. All our obsessive focus paid off. The almonds we sourced from Sicily (because Californian almond farming was an issue even then), were much more delicious as well as being environmentally friendly, and people loved the flavour of our almond milk. We also replaced all the gums and thickeners and other added ingredients with rice, to bring a lovely smooth and sweet finish. My favourite part was creating the packs. We wanted them to look desirable, something that would look good in the fridge and I couldn't have been happier with the result.

Eleven years on and we now offer a huge range of flavours. Almond is still the best-seller, with Coconut coming up fast and my personal favourite Almond and Oat offering a richer version of our original Almond Drink. The most difficult thing for us to achieve has been keeping our commitment to kitchen cupboard ingredients and making the milks Barista standard. It's easy if you're happy to add gums and stabilisers. But we aren't so it's taken years and been a labour of love. I am very proud of what we've achieved.

Tell us about the working culture at Rude Health?

We describe ourselves as a glass-half-full team, and I see it in action every day. The team support each other and have a lot of fun while getting things done. One of the things that brings me most joy is that a lot of the people who have worked at Rude Health are still friends years later. I believe that people do their best work when they are being themselves so that's the culture I have tried to foster from the beginning. You'd have to ask the team how successful I've been.

How are you funded?

We started the business with £4,000 in 2006 and other than a raise in 2008 for about £150,000 it has been entirely self-funded. It's not the fastest way to build a business but I believe it is the most responsible and sustainable way. We haven't spent other people's money, only our own. We did this during an era where fundraising has been normalised and nobody looked at whether the business was really viable. I think this is changing.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

In terms of food, making a milk that doesn't split in coffee without adding ingredients that don't fit our ethos. Coffee is acidic as well as being hot (obviously) and the more acidic it is, the more likely the milk is to "split" and each batch of oats behaves slightly differently as every harvest yields oats with a different balance of protein, fat and carbohydrate. So we are constantly tweaking the recipe to make it work.

Business challenges are a constant. Finding a CEO to take over from me

and Nick as founders was a big deal and big decision. It took us two goes to find Tim, who I learn from every day. I've learned enough from him now to know that I was not born to be a CEO. Watching someone do a job brilliantly is a huge joy and it's helped me see what I'm good at: ideas and starting things up.

How does Rude Health answer an unmet need?

We all want to eat well and look after ourselves and we don't want to compromise on taste or enjoyment. We pioneered this approach in breakfast cereals and milks.

What's in store for the future?

Our Organic Oat Barista milk is hitting shelves now, you'll find it in Waitrose and Ocado, with another major retailer in the pipeline.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

If I were learning from my own mistakes, then I'd say I went at the business as if it was a sprint. Inevitably it was more of a marathon, so I pushed myself too hard for too long. Building a business takes a huge amount of energy so make sure you have support, whether that's from colleagues, support at home or a partner who will share the load. Whatever works, but look after yourself.

And finally, a more personal question! What's

your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

After a lifetime of doing, I'm learning to be. This starts with half an hour of not doing before I start my day, ideally as the sun comes up. Then I have a breakfast of Ultimate Granola & yoghurt and coffee. Then it's whatever the day needs, which is a mixture of helping steer Rude Health, and helping to support my mostly grown-up kids. Today has comprised a Directors' discussion, a meeting about updating the website and developing the café menu. Weekends revolve around food and friends, and going away in my campervan.

Camilla Barnard is the cofounder of Rude Health.



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