

The Daily Telegraph

www.telegraph.co.uk

BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING QUALITY DAILY

Tuesday, January 8, 2008

STARTING OUT By Widget Finn

Bra straps attract the right support

Dao Tran-Boyd claims that her products save women from misery and embarrassment. If male readers have lost interest at this point, hang around. Tran-Boyd's company is called Glamorous Bra Straps.

For eight years Tran-Boyd worked in the City as the only woman trading in cocoa futures. Then marriage and three children interrupted her career. "A decade later I wanted to join the grown-up world again." She started selling websites and went freelance so she could combine work and family, but this didn't use up all her energy.

"I'm always thinking up new business ideas, and two years ago I saw a woman wearing jewelled bra straps. I immediately knew this was my next enterprise." She started very modestly, making the straps herself and selling them in people's homes, at local markets and at Christmas fairs.

"But I often only sold enough to cover my costs," she said. "I hadn't found the right outlets and the profit margin was tiny, so after a year I decided to increase the volume of sales by using a manufacturer. On the internet I found a Chinese company which still provides wonderful service. The manager speaks perfect English, and when I have a rush order he's out in the bead market at midnight buying stock for me.

"I had to grow the business from hand to mouth but I reached a stage where I needed to expand so I borrowed a few thousand pounds from my website business to do a trade fair and go into wholesale. I always talk to other exhibitors to glean information, and they advised me to try the Earls Court Top Drawer Fair."



Dao Tran-Boyd says her jewelled bra-straps - 30pc of which are now sold online - can save women from misery and embarrassment

Her first trade fair cost several thousand pounds "but we signed up lots of stores, ran out of stock and established that our most successful markets are in gift and fashion accessories".

Trade customers include The Glyndebourne Opera Shop, Fenwicks, garden centres, kitchen shops and beauty salons. "I tell buyers that if you have women customers then Glamorous Bra Straps will sell well."

Six months ago, Tran-Boyd created an online shopping facility which now accounts for 30pc of business, but she is keen to expand the retail side. "I love meeting customers and finding out what they like." They range from women in their 80s to those who've had mastectomies - 10p from every set sold online goes to Breast Cancer Research.

"I should have had an e-commerce website straight away, and

concentrated more on marketing the products sooner."

She is driven on by the necessity to keep ahead of competitors. "Six months ago at the Harrogate Gift Fair another exhibitor was selling the same products very cheaply and copied our logo". She is a member of Anti-Copying in Design which wrote a warning letter to the miscreants, who have since disappeared.

This year Tran-Boyd plans to expand into Europe but she has even bigger dreams. "I plan to set up a factory in the Vietnamese village where I come from, and introduce a range of clothes which will fund schooling for the locals, who are desperately poor."

It's a good marketing angle - buy more bra straps and help Tran-Boyd's dream come true.