

Entrepreneur breaks down barriers with persistence

by Heidi Riley

Small Business

Nine years ago, Dorece MacMillan of Marshfield was shopping in an Island gift shop when she noticed a big 50-pound potato bag filled with bags of potato chips for sale. She thought it was a clever marketing idea, and she soon put it to good use.

"I liked the concept of making a connection between PEI potatoes and potato chips," says Dorece. After some careful thought, she bought five-pound potato bags and filled them with clear cellophane bags of potato chips purchased from a local manufacturer. Then she packed up her three small children and hauled crates of the packaged chips to her sister's grocery store in Cavendish.

"I set up a display with one case of chips, and in 15 minutes, every bag of chips had sold," says Dorece. "That's when I knew I had a winner." She also knew she had to create a design that would meet the packaging standards of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's guidelines.

Selling is in her blood

Encouraged by success, Dorece started a business out of her own home called **PEI Specialty Chip Company**. The first year, she expanded her market to five stores by cold calling. "I was never afraid to talk to store owners and managers about carrying my product. I was inspired by my father, who was a peddler going door to door back in the days when people rarely traveled to town to buy what they needed."

Promotion

She decided to exhibit her idea at the 2001 **PEI Buyer's Market**, an annual showcase for Island wholesalers. She was advised that it would be wise to protect her idea with a trademark. She made many phone calls, asked many questions, and finally discovered that she could apply to register her trademark on her own without hiring a lawyer.

After the Buyer's Market, she learned that someone tried to register her design and was turned down. "If I had not taken that good advice and trademarked my design, I would have lost the rights to it," says Dorece.

"Attending the Buyer's Market resulted in 65 new accounts. I had to expand quickly to fill all those new orders." Dorece bought a second-hand delivery van, hired a driver, and planned delivery routes.

A new product

Two years later, someone joked that her next venture would be selling lobster flavoured chips. One day while picking up more potato bags, she noticed a bag with a lobster pictured on it that was meant for packaging lobsters. Remembering



Nine years ago, Dorece MacMillan created a new brand: PEI Specialty Chips. Sales have gone way beyond her expectations.

the lobster joke, she put the concept of lobster flavoured potato chips in motion.

"It was difficult to find a manufacturer to produce my idea," says Dorece. "In fact, one manufacturer laughed so hard he could barely get his breath." Dorece persisted and contacted a number of producers until one agreed to produce lobster flavoured chips.

"The lobster flavoured chips were a major hit," says Dorece. "I attended every trade show, and the orders kept pouring in. Now 75 percent of my business is for the lobster chips."

Employment

This is a seasonal business which runs from May to October. Most staff come back year after year. A **driver/sales rep** delivers the products and a **supervisor** watches over the crew of people who package the chips. "I hire my own teens, their friends, and neighbours within walking or biking distance," says Dorece. "When the big transport trucks make a delivery, friends and neighbours get involved. People pitch in to move the boxes from the truck to the warehouse."

In addition to managing PEI Specialty Chip Co., Dorece has a job with the federal government, and she also runs a kiosk selling jewelry to cruise ship passengers at the Charlottetown waterfront.

Dorece's advice for new entrepreneurs

- If you have a great idea, pursue it.
- Never stop asking questions. If your ideas are turned down, don't get discouraged. You can find a solution if you don't give up.
- Don't give up your day job. When you start a new venture, move inch by inch.
- There is no one single place to get all the answers. It's up to you to do the research.
- Stay in the public eye. Your customers need to have confidence that you will be able to keep them supplied.
- Practice good business ethics and give excellent customer service.
- Be good to your staff. Pay them accordingly and then some.
- The most important thing is to have enough confidence and belief in your product so that barriers won't stop you. If you don't have this level of enthusiasm, wait until you do.

For more information, call Dorece MacMillan at 629-1818.



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Also visit the **Jean Canfield** building in Charlottetown.

www.employmentjourney.com