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Business best

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We continue our Bond Pearce LLP supported series, Business Best, which highlights the achievements of some of the region's top business personalities, offers an insight into their success and what they believe makes a difference in the business world.

TEAM WORK

This month we talk to business partners and joint owners of Yes Pure Intimacy Ltd SUSI LENNOX and SARAH BROOKS



TO DESCRIBE Susi Lennox and Sarah Brooks as evangelical about their business would be to belie the serious science that underpins it – it does, however, hint at the passion which drives them.

The fact that they have chosen to focus their energies in the intimate lubricant market often elicits a childish response. Given that market is worth \$1.3 billion per annum and that the entire female population of the globe is a potential customer should be enough to quell the sniggers.

The personal and professional journey they have travelled to reach this point – they wholly own the company which has a patent on the world's first certified organic intimacy product – is a remarkable one. All the more so because it is a million miles from the career trajectories on which they originally embarked.

An English graduate, Susi originally trained as a yoga and meditation therapist before branching into mainstream personal development, coaching and counselling with organisations such as IBM and IBA.

What followed was a 'charmed and busy' period in a peripatetic position with an international consultancy. She was in the privileged situation of being taken quickly into the confidence of a company and coaching at board level from Brussels to Borneo – largely in the petrochemicals industry.

Sarah on the other hand grew up 'on the back of a horse in rural Kent'. Her gap year was spent in Australia where her fearless approach and entrepreneurial spirit were given free rein – she arrived with £200 in

her pocket and became a Pommy encyclopaedia sales person to fund her trip.

Her father's untimely death during her A' Level year naturally impacted heavily on her life and with it her business studies ambitions. Nonetheless in a display of single-minded determination to make it to Edinburgh University she opted for chemistry instead.

It was her first experience of city life and Edinburgh was magical – unlike Grangemouth where her PhD research into growth regulators took her, or Southampton, which followed.

That was where she began her commercial career on Exxon Chemicals' management fast track programme having realised that she needed 'to do something with the rest of her life' once research chemistry, and Grangemouth, proved it wasn't for her!

She flourished in the freedom and excitement of the Exxon culture and nurtured a dream that she might one day take the helm of this world class business. It was then, quite simply, a great place to work. By the mid 1980s Sarah was one of only a handful of women in senior roles.

That was when she met Susi for the first time. She was part of a consultancy team undertaking a study into diversity in the workplace. When Sarah's path took her from sales to operations manager for Exxon Airports and general

manager of its aircraft fuelling subsidiary it was Susi she called on for help in improving the culture.

But it was a time of huge disillusionment for Sarah. In the watershed following the Exxon Valdez oil spill and the company's woeful response to it, she re-examined her values. Quite simply, after nine years she had lost faith and once again needed 'to do something with the rest of her life'. The answer came in the form of Susi's brother's consultancy Co-Development International.

She joined the team advising BP and CRA

on its joint venture and found herself in Borneo. Ironically she

and Susi were never there at the same time, but both recall it as an extraordinary adventure marked by memories of orang-utans nesting on golf courses and the globe's largest insects falling on the roof of the huts they lived in.

For Sarah this was just the start of a globe trotting existence – she was still living in Winchester – working with the world's biggest pharmaceutical corporations and leading teams to put in place the complex procedures associated with drug safety such as adverse effect reporting and guidance across huge global networks.

Her clients included the likes of Bayer (where Susi and Sarah worked together in Wuppertal), Pfizer – where she co-ordinated single process

reporting among 40 European companies into its New York head office – and the post merger integration of Glaxo Wellcome and Smith Klein Beecham. By the late 1990s, she was the oracle on pharmaco vigilance compliance.

In 2002 after years of working incredibly hard, weekly long haul flights and, Sarah wryly reflects, probably drinking and smoking too much, she finished a major cross-Atlantic project and collapsed, burned out. She was physically decimated and unable to work.

By then the pair's world views had been shaped by a growing appreciation that in mainstream medicine nothing is truly 'safe' and that they both 'needed to do something with the rest of our lives'. After much soul searching they formally agreed to start a business based on shared values, ethics and beliefs and with a promise to change the world from the inside out – no compromises.

The Luberation Laboratory was born – the seed of the idea sown from a gift that Sarah used to make for her friends for fun. That was 2003. Their six-month lead time turned into three-and-a-half years, but by then the Yes Pure Intimacy range was patented, certified organic, approved by the Soil Association Organic Standard, the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics and The Vegetarian Society as well as a registered medical device satisfying stringent medical criteria.

Yes products contain no parabens – a hugely debated area in the cancer debate – just natural ingredients and natural preservatives. Theirs is the only product suitable for women in sudden onset early menopause following cancer treatment. Their second year of trading saw sales increase by 137 per cent. Internet sales are soaring, their distributors expanding at a phenomenal pace and Susi and Sarah are back on their personal trajectories.

They have also redefined their business goals, having been horrified by the legal but nonetheless potentially harmful products in the intimate market. Championing change is now as important as creating their breakthrough products.

And the next one is about to launch – a dual system of sperm-friendly and rebalancing lubricants which, unlike every other intimate product on the market, don't act as a spermicide – designed with the millions of couples trying to make babies in mind.

Don't be confused into thinking of them only as worthy however, these are women with warmth, compassion and enduring humour – the website name, yesyesyes.org, should give that away – and after six years they are still laughing about the 'seminal' moments on their shared journey!

