



AIB's Women in Enterprise winners revisited

Two previous AIB Women in Enterprise winners share their insights into new ways of working, advice for other entrepreneurs and their growth strategies for 2021, having navigated their way through a challenging year.

AIB Women in Enterprise has brought over 800 businesses through its programme over the course of three years. Designed to assist participants' leadership, growth strategies and to enable business owners to use their skills to further their business ambitions, these strategic training workshops were delivered by the Entrepreneurs Academy.

The programme was designed for SMEs, the backbone of the Irish economy, and programmes such as AIB Women in Enterprise support the needs of businesses to back them to achieve their dreams and ambitions.



Women in Enterprise
#backedbyAIB

Further information on AIB supports for business can be found by visiting www.aib.ie/business

WINNER OF
AIB WOMEN IN
ENTERPRISE
STRATEGIC GROWTH
AWARD 2019

BUSINESS OWNER:
WENDY SLATTERY

BUSINESS NAME:
THE BEAUTY BUDDY

WEBSITE:
THEBEAUTYBUDDY.COM



Tracy Leavy, COO,
and Wendy Slattery, CEO,
The Beauty Buddy

A data analytics company specialising in the beauty and cosmetic industry, The Beauty Buddy is bridging the gap between brands and their consumers in an industry worth €800bn.

The way it works is to gather data through an app that does for the beauty industry what Tripadvisor does for travel. It captures user interaction with products, brands and retailers. This live data is extremely valuable to both brands and industry partners, providing unique insights into consumer behaviours, competitive comparisons and sentiment analysis and enabling product personalisation and other advantages at scale.

The Beauty Buddy app is an inclusive community of beauty buddies made up of honest, independent peers who connect with each other to learn about and decide which products to buy.

Q: What has been happening in your business over the past year?

A: Since winning the AIB Women in Enterprise Award we raised a pre-seed round of €575,000 as part of the High Potential Start Up programme with Enterprise Ireland. Following our consumer launch in November 2019, we were voted 'App of the Year' by the Irish Independent – again, significant recognition for the development of the consumer-facing side of the app and the experience it brings to beauty lovers.

We are now a team of nine, made up of co-founders, tech experts and engineers, sales, marketing and expert consultants. There are thousands of users actively using the app, creating profiles, reviewing products and connecting with each other. We have also affiliate partnerships with some of the biggest retailers and eCommerce sites, such as Brown Thomas, Arnotts, Harvey Nichols, Lookfantastic and Feelunique.

Q: What impact has Covid-19 had on your business?

A: Our business was affected by Covid-19 as our customers, the brands and retailers were severely impacted. Plans such as launching Beauty Buddy through advertising and daily team presence with a chain of 30+ stores were put on hold.

We accelerated our future business plans, launching our sampling service, enabling brands to send sample products to Beauty Buddy users. Brands get to showcase their products and the Beauty Buddy users get a unique online experience.

Post Covid-19, we have become the non-contact digital assistant where customers in-store can find out all about a product without picking it up, providing them with a positive in-store digital experience.

Q: Have you changed your ways of working or routes to market utilising technology?

A: Yes, definitely! From the very start we moved the team to work from home and as a team we have excelled. Originally we travelled to our customers here in Ireland and abroad. We now have all our calls and onboarding through Zoom. This year, we launched virtually, using digital marketing tailored to specific areas of the UK and New York in the US. We are now talking to investors from all parts of the globe. Covid-19 has changed that landscape and made it much more accessible for us.

Q: What advice would you give to other entrepreneurs in Ireland?

A: My advice has always been not to have any regrets if you're thinking of starting a business; go for it. If you are in business and impacted by Covid-19, look at ways you can pivot. There is no such thing as failure in my eyes; it's learning and, in business, you need to be constantly moving forward even if it's not the direct path you had planned.

Finally, your network! Build a great network of people especially those ahead of you who have done it already. Surround yourself with the right people, they will help raise you up, not pull you down.

Q: What is next for Beauty Buddy?

A: Market growth is in our immediate future plans. We are in the middle of our UK market launch which has brought with it UK media support.

We are currently raising a seed round of €1m and are actively looking for the right investors to join us. Throughout 2021, while growing in existing markets, we plan to scale into the US. We also have plans to increase our tech team to meet market demands.

With a pivoting strategy in place throughout Covid-19, we discovered revenue generating services we can offer brands. Through the success of these we intend to develop further and instigate new features and services into 2021.

WINNER OF AIB WOMEN IN ENTERPRISE STRATEGIC GROWTH AWARD 2018

BUSINESS OWNER:
NOELLE O'CONNOR

BUSINESS NAME:
TANORGANIC

WEBSITE:
TANORGANIC.COM



In 1996, with a loan of £2,000 from my local credit union, I set up a beauty salon in Newbridge, Co Kildare. Over the next ten years, I grew that business to include six medi-spas across the country. Business was doing great until the downturn in 2008 which changed everything. Having fought hard to survive, I had to wind down the business.

To help focus on the future, I enrolled on a master's programme in entrepreneurship in MIT, Boston. With 60 other entrepreneurs from around the world – all under the age of 40 – it was challenging and stimulating.

During one guest lecture, Simon Sinek talked to us about finding our 'why'. This intrigued me to the point of upset as I felt I didn't know my 'why' and was looking down the bleak hole of a recession in 2009. He posed an interesting question to me: "When in your business were you at your happiest?"

I began researching the organic side of the business and saw a gap in the market for a tan that was like a skincare. That's when I came up with the idea for a new organic and sustainable self-tan. For the next two years, I worked with cosmetic scientists both in Ireland and the US to develop the first and only ECO-certified organic self-tan brand in the world not in plastic packaging.

Q: What has been happening in TanOrganic since you won the AIB Women in Enterprise award?

A: Since Women in Enterprise I really have put the building blocks and processes in place to scale the business. Putting a board and CEO in place was one of the best decisions I made. I then put, and still am putting, a top-league industry experienced team in place that can grow and run the business independent of me so that I can spend time on the business rather than in the business. I took my to-do list from that programme and ticked as many of the boxes as I could.

We have used Covid-19 lockdown time to work

on projects we just didn't have the time for and as a result have finalised a new brand for 2021 and will launch TanOrganic's brand refresh and six to eight new products for 2021.

Q: What impact has Covid-19 had on your business?

A: We have been seriously affected by Covid-19, as our distribution channel partners have been impacted and not least travel retail, which was 30% of our business. Retail and international distributors made up another 50% of our business and those channels have been affected too.

Pre-Covid-19 our business was 3% online, now we are 30% online and 2021 will see us 50%

online. We have had to pivot fast and use our downtime wisely to create opportunities for 2021.

Q: Have you changed your ways of working or routes to market utilising technology?

A: Working remotely has suited us as a company. We have worked very well as a remote team during Covid-19 and been even more productive. We have focused on the direct-to-consumer market and will continue to do so while supporting our other channels and distribution networks.

Q: What advice would you give to other entrepreneurs in Ireland?

A: Now, more than ever, know your 'why' and your purpose. Focus on what you can do, not what you can't do. Invest in your team and give them your time so that they can grow with your company.

Q: What is next for TanOrganic?

A: We have used our time wisely so we will have an exciting 2021 with a brand refresh, new brands and products. We will add more industry expertise to the team and our board. There are so many good people out there now. 2020 has been a very challenging year but I am very grateful to be still in business. Getting our strategy and team right and staying focused will be my to-do list for 2021.