



Cooking Up a Business

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How many times has this happened to you?

You're out somewhere - maybe at your local kosher supermarket or at a *kiddush* in shul - when an item catches your eye. You think to yourself "I bet I could make that at home!" I have headed for my kitchen on many an occasion to duplicate food I've seen...with mixed results. Chocolate covered Oreos and chocolate bark? I have pretty much nailed those by now, while other experiments have been less successful. But while I have only dabbled in creating gourmet goodies, others have taken their ideas to the max, using their kitchens as springboards to food-based businesses that have been embraced by kosher consumers.

Eat the Rainbow

The first thing you need to know about Fruits by Peshah, a business that sells really unique dehydrated fruits and vegetable platters, is that despite its feminine sounding name, the company is actually run by a man. The second important bit of information is that Peshah doesn't even exist.

Hezi Yazdi and his wife Rachel are Flatbush residents and the parents of four, who often made fruit platters for family members in their spare time. When they got a request from their children's school, Yeshiva of Flatbush, to make 1200 dried fruit baskets they decided to go for it, although Hezi Yazdi readily admits that they had no idea what they were doing at the time.

"Thank G-d everyone loved it and went crazy for it so we knew there was something there," Yazdi said. "We started doing platters with fruits, chocolate dipped fruits, and even vegetables - whatever the customers wanted."

The Yazdis realized that they needed a name if they were going to make things official. Rachel Yazdi threw out the name Fruits by Peshah, drawing on the memory of an elementary school substitute who repeatedly called her Peshah Bella, a name that somehow seemed to stick with

her friends.

Yazdi began dehydrating his fruit at home, eventually moving out of the house to an 1100 square foot facility in order to accommodate the commercial machinery necessary for the 18-hour dehydrating process. Things accelerated to the next level when Yazdi sent batches of his products to social media influencers including Naomi Nachman, Miriam Pascal, Sara Lasry, Esty Wolbe, and Jacqueline Elbaz, hoping for nothing more than their feedback on the product. The items were so well received that they were featured in numerous Instagram posts, growing the company's reach even further.

Not surprisingly, there have been a few items that haven't worked out well. A request for passionfruit proved, pardon the pun, fruitless, as by the time all the seeds were removed there wasn't enough fruit left to work with. Sweet potatoes were another bomb, resulting in a product that was rock hard, although Yazdi hopes to try again, this time blanching the sweet potatoes before putting them in the dehydrator. A suggestion to try drying honey in the hopes of achieving something sweet and cracker-like was another disappointment.

"We came back the next day and there was nothing left," said Yazdi. "It had all evaporated."

Other experiments have been wildly successful. Fruits by Peshah's dehydrated marshmallows have been a hit with customers. The company's new cold pressed juices have also been well received. While beef jerky, another dehydrated product, has been all the rage, Yazdi prefers not to go in that direction and he is considering trying his hand at fruit leather and smoothies.

As in so many other startups, particularly those in the food business, finances are always a significant hurdle, but Yazdi sees a bright future in fruits.

"People call us up all the time and ask us 'are you sure there is no sugar in here?' because that's how good our product is," says Yazdi. "We hear from people who say that our fruit is practically addictive and that they can't stop eating it."

Cris for Cookie

Tell me you don't sneak cookie batter out

of the mixer bowl when no one is looking.

Come on, it's no secret; we all do it and while we enjoy that stolen taste of heaven, there is always that voice whispering your ear, reminding you that there can be all sorts of hidden dangers lurking in raw dough. Well, fear not, cookie dough lovers: Lakewood resident Shana Zeiger has got your back, with Incredoughble, egg-free cookie dough made with heat treated flour so that it is as safe as it is delicious.

Zeiger, a 30-year-old mother of five, is both creative and resourceful. She spent approximately nine years working as a paralegal, running a variety of extra projects in her spare time including a homemade costume business and a custom bakery business where she made *upsheerin* cakes, royal icing cookies, gourmet cupcakes, and mini cheesecakes, which ultimately sparked the birth of Incredoughble.

"I had been selling the cheesecakes for Shavuot for the last few years in crazy flavors and everyone went nuts for the cookie dough one," said Zeiger. "We love cookie dough in our house and have made all kinds of desserts with it. One day I started experimenting with different flavors of cookie dough and my husband brought it to shul and all of his friends loved it."

It took about three months for Zeiger to put together a margarine-based cookie dough that had just the right texture and could be eaten straight out of the refrigerator. Zeiger perfected her base recipe and began with four flavors: original, oatmeal, brownie batter, and cake batter. She can put together a batch of cookie dough in under four minutes flat. Her big break





came last June when food stylist Esther Ottensoser featured her cookie dough in a Kosher.com article, and things really took off in August when she participated in Ohr Naava's Summer MRKT event in Loch Sheldrake, where people were bowled over by her product. Things have been moving quickly since then. Zeiger estimates that she averages 20 to 30 orders on a regular week, with Incredoughble bringing sweet joy to customers across the country.

Incredoughble introduces three new flavors each season, with pumpkin spice, carrot cake, and maple pecan currently hitting it big with customers.

Becoming kosher certified by the KCL wasn't particularly difficult for Incredoughble, with Zeiger sticking to specific brands of ingredients and *yoshon* flour and working in a completely separate kitchen to obtain the *hashgacha*. A second kitchen in the family home that was being used exclusively for storage became cookie dough central, and while she originally worked with a standard sized four-quart mixer, Zeiger upgraded to a six-quart size to keep up with customer demand. Zeiger has been considering a more capacious 20-quart mixer, a commercial machine with a \$1000 price tag. A mixer is the only real equipment she needs to make her product other than a heat source to pre-treat her flour to ensure that it is safe to eat. Looking ahead, Zeiger is also eyeing more fridge and refrigerator space, something she will likely need when her website goes live, and she is also working on commercial packaging to bring Incredoughble to the masses at brick and mortar stores.

For now, things are full steam ahead for Incredoughble and Zeiger is preparing for what is sure to be a busy Chanukah season.

Some days, as she describes it, she is up to her neck in cookie dough, and she is in the enviable position of having her biggest obstacle being keeping up with customer demand for her sweet treats. Zeiger looks forward to growing the company and developing even more enticing flavors that will have people digging in and enjoying what was once considered to be a forbidden food.

"Being a paralegal was nice, but not half as fun as this," said Zeiger. "We have people ordering cookie dough for parties and as gifts for their wives and kids' birthdays. We even had a bas mitzvah girl who asked for cookie dough instead of cake. I have done lots of things I loved before, but nothing has ever taken off like this."

Small but Mighty

There is no question that Bracha and Rachelli Rosenthal are not your average entrepreneurs. The Flatbush-based sisters first launched their home-based business in November 2016 when they decided to send over a platter of goodies to someone who was celebrating the birth of a baby. The chocolate covered pretzels were so beautiful that the party planner who had been hired to manage the *simchah* was convinced that they had been prepared by a professional, never once dreaming that they had been made by a pair of grade schoolers, ages ten and eight.

While the Rosenthal girls had always enjoyed puttering around in the kitchen, their business has its roots in a *mitzvah*, with their chocolate melted in a hot cocoa machine they got from a Chai Lifeline fundraiser. Their mother, Shulamith Rosenthal, bought some chocolate molds and colored chocolate and the girls began their tasty work, concentrating initially on chocolate-covered pretzels, and expanding their repertoire over time to include peanut chews, truffles, bark, and logs.

The Rosenthal's equipment has grown with their business, the Chai Lifeline hot cocoa machine melting its last ounce of chocolate and giving way first to multiple Wilton melting pots and then to a heat-controlled Kitchen Aid pot with a special tempering setting. Their Martellato

chocolate melter, which can handle four to five pounds of chocolate at a time and whose depth can accommodate pretzel rods, is used primarily for big orders. All in all, Rosenthal estimated that her girls have over a dozen pots and more than 100 different chocolate molds.

Yummy Blessings is under the *hashgacha* of Rabbi Yisroel Gornish, with all products prepared in a special basement kitchen that was *kashered* to his specifications and outfitted with all new tools.

"Nothing, not even a spoon, can be used from our regular kitchen," noted Rosenthal.

Chocolate making takes place only after all homework has been completed. Bracha and Rachelli both change into their pajamas before they start working to keep their clothes from getting covered in chocolate. The girls have done bakes sales and donated products to numerous charitable organizations including Bonei Olam, Chai Lifeline, Kids of Courage, Ohr Naava, Yad Eliezer, and Strivright, each time being rewarded for their generosity.

"Literally every single step of the way, every time they have done something that is *tzedakah* related something positive has happened and they have been able to go further," said Rosenthal. "They are always happy to help organizations and get involved, sending a sizable amount to benefit them, which always makes them feel very accomplished. They know that at this point in their lives it's not like they need the income."



Rosenthal estimated that her girls can make 20 to 30 miniatures per hour, on average. The smaller items such as peanut chews and Oreos involve more intricate work, with the amount of time varying on the complexity of the design. Chocolate logs can take three to four hours to finish, but require less hands-on time.

The sisters run their business largely off orders, and they have many out of town customers.* Not surprisingly, Purim is their busiest time of year, with extra help brought in to do the prep work while Bracha and Racheli focus on the decorating.

Bracha and Racheli both attend Bais Yaakov D'Rav Meir and are currently in eighth and sixth grades, respectively. They have done many demos, including one this past summer at Camp Rena in Flatbush for 475 girls, with the younger division making chocolate playing cards and the teen division doing game boards with checkers. While few girls their ages must juggle summer plans with their business, Bracha and Racheli do. The sisters stayed local during the summer of 2018 so that they could keep working and went to sleepaway camp for just one month this past summer.

And what will happen to Yummy Blessings, which has nearly 3,000 Instagram followers, when high school and its more significant work load become a reality?

"We're not thinking about that yet," admitted Rosenthal, who said that they never imagined that the business would grow as large as it has. "Right now, we are just taking it one day at a time."

A Recipe for Success?

While the stories of those who have successfully turned their passion into a moneymaker are always exciting, it is important to remember there are likely many others who have taken the plunge only to find that the business just wasn't viable. But today, with social media giving anyone the opportunity to put their products out in a big way and a generous dose of Divine assistance, it has never been easier to get something started that will hopefully produce big results. So think it over, *daven* to be led in the right

direction, and then make an educated decision. Who knows? The next big thing to hit the kosher world might just be yours! | JE

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