

Teenage twins making a mark

17-year-old entrepreneurs (and twins) from Galway, Mary and Sarah Murphy have created a hand-held gun to mark sheep. Up next? World domination.

How did you start? Why did you start?

The idea came to us when we were marking our own sheep on the family farm. We thought: 'There must be a better way of doing this?'

We set up our company as a transition year mini-company in 2014 to compete in the Student Enterprise Awards. After a successful first year, we registered as a private limited company.

We continued to develop the product. We changed the material of the nozzle and tried different fluids in the gun, but it wasn't until September/October 2015 when we were thinking of an idea to compete in the Student Enterprise Awards that we decided to produce the guns to be sold. [The kit currently retails at €60, this includes a gun, a cartridge, and a nozzle.] [Visit the twins' website here.](#)

Market research and patenting

We carried out research to see would there be a market for our product. We then produced 100 guns and gave 20 to local sheep farmers. The feedback was very positive. We brought the product to market in February 2016 as soon our patent was pending.

We continued to sell the product and have attended numerous agricultural trade shows including the Tullamore Show and the National Ploughing Championships.

Awards and *The Late Late*

The product was a great success at the trade shows. We have gone from strength to strength competing in various enterprise awards such as the Student Enterprise Awards where we placed third nationally, the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition where we placed third in our category and the Get Up and Go mini company awards where we were placed in the top three. We have also appeared on *The Late Late Show* with our business and won competitions such as the Student Summit Pitch competition, Engineer's Den, and Scifest.

In a market where there are alternatives what makes your product stand out?

Traditionally, farmers mark their sheep with a bucket of marking fluid and apply the liquid with a brush or a stick. Farmers can also use aerosol spray cans to mark their sheep. However, marking fluid has many advantages compared to the aerosol sprays. These include the health risks that go with the majority of the sprays. The marking sprays are most often in aerosol cans which contain harmful chemicals and CFCs. These are not only bad for the farmer's health but also pose a significant threat to the environment.

Also, as many farmers will tell you, marking fluid lasts longer than the standard sprays.

Biggest achievement to date?

Our greatest achievement to date was winning the national final of the Student Summit pitch competition.

What marketing or branding (not on sheep) do you do? What do you find most useful?

To promote our product we exhibit at agricultural trade shows, meetings, and livestock marts. We also used Donedeal.ie and social networking sites to promote our product and direct customers to our website.

What are your pet peeves in business?

One of our pet peeves in business is negativity. Both Mary and I believe in the importance of positivity. When someone is negative, it affects the people around them.

To be successful, you must be positive and have belief in yourself and the people around you. It is important to surround yourself with positive people and enjoy what you're doing.

What's the most important thing you have learned so far in business?

The most important thing we have learned so far in business is the significance of networking. It is fantastic to be able to talk to other entrepreneurs and learn from their mistakes.

Describe your average day, how has this changed since you started your company?

Like most 17-year-olds we still go to school every day. We allocate time each evening to fill out orders, answer emails and spend time on the company along with getting all our schoolwork done.

Depending on how busy business is or how much work we have to do at school, like a lot of students we often end up getting up early or staying up late to get our business done.

What's it like working in the agri sector today?

The implications of Brexit are worrying. However, we are hopeful that Irish agribusinesses will continue to succeed. In the past, the agricultural sector has been largely dominated by men, but over the last few years, the industry has seen more women becoming involved. This is an exciting time for women in agriculture, and we hope to see more young women setting up successful agribusinesses.

What advice would you give to younger entrepreneurs wanting to start their own business?

If we were to give advice to budding entrepreneurs, we would say 'never give up'. If something doesn't work, don't be afraid to try something else. We would say: 'Work hard, stay positive and don't be afraid to ask for help.'

Personally, we have found so many people willing to help us; our business teacher in school, other entrepreneurs and the Local Enterprise Office.

At every event we attend, we learn something new. By just talking to other entrepreneurs or other competitors in competitions you can learn so much.

Each of us has our talents, and if there is something you can help another person with, chances are they can help you with something as well.

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