

CONTEST
WINNER!

Company

Building Success in the Company of Women

Growth Issue

CHANGE BYTES:
WHAT
ARE YOU
GROWING?

SALES:
DEVELOP
YOUR
GIANT
REDWOOD
ATTITUDE

PERSONAL
GROWTH:
NO PAIN
NO GAIN

\$3.50 Summer 2010



NADJA PIATKA
Muffins to millions



From muffins to millions

Meet Nadja Piatka

BY ANNE DAY

After 20 years of marriage, Nadja Piatka's dentist husband announced he was leaving – leaving her for another woman, leaving her a mountain of debt. With no job, no alimony and only child support, she had to sell the house, the cars and everything else that would bring in some cash.

As she hid under the kitchen table to avoid the creditors at her door, Nadja vowed that never again would she put herself or her children in such a shameful situation. “My parents raised me to take responsibility. I knew I had to use my gumption to change my life.” She wrote her ambitious goals on a piece of cardboard, and within a year had achieved all but one of them.

While she had trained as a teacher, she'd stayed home with her children. She had also helped her husband in his dental office, but had no formal marketable skills. “I was unemployed and unemployable. I realized that the only person who would hire me was me.”

In some ways, working for herself was

not such a stretch. As a child, she'd watched her Ukrainian parents run their own restaurant in Toronto, and she loved to bake. After baking several batches of her own special low-fat muffins at 4 o'clock in the morning, she then began delivering her fresh baked goods to local coffee shops in Edmonton.

It was hard work, but Nadja began to feel good about herself. “I was taking control of my future.” Recognizing that if the business was to grow she had to work smarter, not harder, she outsourced the baking to a local bakery. This way, she could focus her energies on marketing her products.

She went into partnership with two other women and together they formed Three Blondes and a Brownie. Each invested \$100 in the business. Getting into the local McDonald's in Edmonton with fat-reduced muffins was their first break, and soon their muffins were sold at McDonald's Canada-wide. For eight years the partnership worked well. However, when it became clear that >

the three of them had different goals for the business, Nadja bought out the others. “We had built a shotgun clause into our partnership agreement, which was a good thing. It is important to define your terms very clearly at the start,” she advises. Ultimately, Nadja sold her intellectual property to Quaker Oats, who then supplied the muffins to McDonald’s, and she moved onto other products.

Her next successful creation was her famous fat-reduced brownies, which she now supplies on contract to Subway throughout Canada and the U.S.

Today, Nadja has grown a multi-million dollar business, selling her products in Canada and the U.S. to Subway restaurants, Sodexo, grocery-store chains, as well as online. “The key is to always keep redefining yourself and diversifying, so you are not just one product.” This economy, she observes, has forced everyone to sharpen their business tools and creativity and she, for one, is enjoying the opportunity to form strategic alliances with other companies.

When Nadja decided she wanted to be on *Oprah*, she was strategic. In conjunction with pitching her story to the *Oprah* team, she made sure that her brownies were sold at the Subway restaurant opposite the Harpo studio. As the *Oprah* staff enjoyed her products, they talked it up internally, and she was invited to be on the show.

“Being on the show and meeting Oprah was magical,” reports Nadja. “The show aired five times, and each time we were inundated with emails and letters from around the world.”

Many of the letter writers were seeking advice on how to start a business.

Nadja was quick to point out that it takes hard work, passion, and determination to succeed. “You really have to believe in the value of your product and service.”

To take your business to the next level, Nadja recommends that you get more creative and expand your product range or services. Her growing product line now includes organic macaroons and cookies, petite angel cakes, and even an innovative line of delicious vegetable-based cookies. “Forming strategic alliances can help you grow your business, giving you renewed energy as you work together with others.”

It also helps if you recognize a gap that hasn’t been addressed. Take the Ultimate Girls Getaway, a program Nadja started 15 years ago. “I was single at the time and wanted somewhere to go for a break with girlfriends.” Proceeds from the program, held in Quebec, go to women in war-torn countries. “We’ve supported 13 women so far,” she shares proudly, “and it feels so good to know we are making a difference. We put up their photos and letters at the event, so the women supported become real to the women there.

“We’ve really become a marketing company, and now I broker other people’s products also.” The food production is still outsourced, with plants in Edmonton, Clear Lake and New York. Now remarried, Nadja divides her time between the U.S. and Canada, with her daughter Veronica also working in the business.

Mary Kay once said, “If you think you can, you can. And if you think you can’t, you’re right.” Clearly Nadja believes she can – and so can you. •