

ADVERTORIAL: From retirement hobby to family business: How mum and son created a spice trade

What started out as a “silly idea” a decade ago to find a retirement hobby changed the lives of mum and son Shashi and Sanjay Aggarwal.

It was Christmas Day 2012 when inspiration for what is now [Spice Kitchen](#) came to them, to sell spice tins online. Little did they know then where it would eventually lead.

Shashi had retired but wanted a new project and, with a life-long love of cooking with spices and gifting them to family and friends, it seemed a logical step to sell them.

Ten years on and they produce award-winning spices, spice blends and gin botanicals, along with items for keen home cooks and gifting.

One of the unique aspects of their product is the tins are wrapped using recycled Indian saris, created by Shashi and a team of seamstresses.

“Mum’s vast knowledge of spices, her heritage growing up in Kenya and India cooking for the family, is the foundation on which everything we do is built,” said Sanjay.

“We started Spice Kitchen with one aim in mind – to inspire people to experiment with flavour and create their own delicious family favourites.”



Mum and son Shashi and Sanjay Aggarwal created Spice Kitchen as a retirement hobby but it grew into a family business. Shashi, known to many as Mama Spice, learned to cook using traditional methods from the age of 9 with her mum and sisters in Kenya.

The spices are sourced from growers and suppliers all over the world, to get the finest quality and flavour. Everything is hand blended using a century-old hand grinder handed down from Shashi's grandmother.

The technique and quality of the blends – recipes also handed down through the generations – means a little goes a long way. You can even find inspiring recipes to try on their website.

In the beginning, after successfully selling via ebay, Sanjay ran a pitch at a local market before trying to branch out. This saw them appear at the BBC Good Food Show and an appearance on the Hairy Bikers show.

Spice Kitchen won several industry awards, including the Gift of the Year and the Great Taste Awards for their family Garam Masala recipe.

The product range expanded to include, alongside its flagship Indian spice tin, middle eastern, world, international chilli, Moroccan and gin botanicals collections.

Sanjay also created a special range of spice blends for babies called Baby Spice Kitchen after seeing how well his daughter responded to new flavours.

“We were truly fortunate to continue to be open throughout the pandemic, and as people started to cook more from home, lots of new customers found us as they were keen to experiment with spices.”



The company has been supported by Be the Business to grow and become more robust

Success saw the pair move from a small unit in Cheshire to a larger space in Liverpool which has resulted in the opportunity to really scale up.

They also have been able to give work opportunities to those struggling to find work via the government's Kickstart Programme.

The company now has a 17-strong team and supplies products through retailers across the UK as well as their online shop.

Sanjay received free support from Be the Business, a not-for-profit organisation which offers a range of services, from digital support to mentoring and advisory programmes providing more tailored and in-depth support.

"With growth always comes its own challenges," he said. "One of the key things is I have never been a manufacturer before, never grown a food business. Be the Business has been amazing."

[Be the Business](#) Strive UK is a Mastercard initiative aimed at supporting and empowering small companies run by Black, Asian and other minorities to thrive, by helping transform their businesses performance. n

It says that research shows outcomes for ethnic minority business owners and entrepreneurs are worse than general business population in the areas of turnover and productivity and they want to help change that.

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There are three core programmes – free as part of the Be the Business Strive programme.

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[Mentoring](#) – This sees small business leaders paired with an experienced business mentor over the course of 12 weeks or 12 months, depending on the needs. The mentor will have regular meetings, act as a sounding board and impartial advisor and support them as they overcome business challenges and develop their leadership skills.

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Executives from some of the UK's leading companies including Accenture, Amazon, John Lewis, Lloyds and Siemens act as mentors, offer new experiences and fresh perspectives which are vital for long-term business improvement.

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Advisory board – The business leader will work with a five-member non-executive director-style board, designed for people facing big decisions or looking for outside perspective.

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They will bring different skill sets to the table and assist with things like finance, marketing, operations and HR.

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Digital – There is a free online library of resources and guides which look at common business problems. This includes action plans, business stories, local support information, bootcamps, guides about everything from taking effective meetings to managing cash flow forecasts and tools and templates around everything from GDPR and marketing to tech and inclusive workplaces.

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Sanjay is getting a 12 month mentorship and has an advisory board working with him to look at his business model and help him find solutions to any issues within it.

“Be the Business really helped to build confidence,” he said. “It gave me an opportunity to have an advisory board and really reduce the risk of me failing, or me failing the business personally.

“It installed leadership qualities in myself and helped me to really look at myself as a business owner and my 360 plan and to also look at our business model and make it stronger ultimately. Every interaction we have with Be the Business is making us stronger.”



Spice Kitchen tins come wrapped in uniquely recycled Indian saris

He said any business that is looking to upscale or is facing issues should seek support from Be the Business. “It’s free support and support from people that really know what they are talking about. It is only going to help and empower you to run a better business.”

To find out more about how Be the Business can help you [visit the website.](#)