

Dragons' Den appearance for Tyneside sisters' firm Pretty Mama sparks rush of orders

A North East fashion start-up has been inundated with orders after braving the Dragons' Den and leaving with a deal involving four of the millionaire entrepreneurs.

Jenny and Alex McFadden, of South Tyneside, appeared on last Thursday's episode of the BBC One show, where viewers saw them pitch their maternity clothing brand Pretty Mama to the panel.

The siblings explained how they are juggling full-time jobs with the clothing company, which was launched four years ago after they spotted a gap in the market for feminine and comfortable maternity wear.

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The company was launched after Alex had struggled to find clothes she liked when she was pregnant with her daughter. She used her skills from a fashion degree from Sunderland University and combined her sister's business and legal knowledge to launch Pretty Mama, specialising in breastfeeding clothing.

[On Dragons' Den](#), they asked for £30,000 in exchange for a 20% stake in the business – but stressed that what they wanted more than anything was advice on how to grow the business.

After hearing their story and determination – including how they're not yet taking a wage from the business as they look to grow it – Touker Souleyman made a pitch of his own, inviting all the Dragons to team up with him and take an equal 6% share of the company in exchange for the investment they

asked for and, more importantly, the Dragons' expertise.

Deborah Meaden bowed out, fearing too many Dragons getting involved in Pretty Mama would complicate matters, but all the others were happy to be on board.

The sisters readily accepted the unique offer – and are now poised to work with North East entrepreneur Sara Davies, as team leader, Steven Bartlett, Peter Jones and Touker Souleyman.

The deal is still going through the due diligence stage but both Jenny, 25, and Alex, 30, said they can't wait to get going.

Alex said: "It was really exciting. When we were going to filming, we said we expected to hear lots of constructive criticism about the business and, as much as we wanted investment in a deal we didn't expect one. It was really surreal.

"I'm a massive fan of the show anyway and it wasn't until we were in the lift that it hit us how far we've come, so I started to panic and got a bit emotional."

Jenny said: "We were both in shock. The model who came out, Hannah, is actually a customer of ours so I think we were just very authentic and relatable.

"I think we're both quite relatable – we both work full time and are only a start-up, our figures are all realistic. The way we valued the company wasn't ridiculous either."



Alex and Jenny McFadden appear on Dragons' Den with their firm Pretty Mama seeking investment

(Image: BBC)

Alex, who lives in Hebburn and works for the civil service in Newcastle, said she and Jenny both took the day off after the show's screening – and they needed the time off to pack up an endless stream of orders that poured into the website after Pretty Mama's appearance.

The website crashed at one point and order numbers have yet to be finalised. The stock is made for Pretty Mama in China, then shipped over to the North East where the girls keep it stored at home. With time, planning, investment and the four Dragons' input they would both eventually like to work full time on Pretty Mama, moving the firm out of their homes into a permanent base in the region.

Alex, who was in the army before going into the civil service, said: "We've had quite a lot of orders come through. We were up until 2am packing orders, had a little bit of sleep and then started back on it again. We've had the music on, having a little packing party.

“The website crashed and said the conformation orders are delayed, so there’s a bit of a backlog! We’ve been inundated which has been amazing. Our mam has been helping too with the picking and packing.”

Jenny, of Pelaw, who works in the marketing department of Northumbria University, said: “It keeps us very busy. We are managing on our own for now, but we can’t wait to see where it goes in the future.”

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