

Dragons' Den success Ben Pearson speaks to Business Live after perfect plus-size clothing pitch

A fashion entrepreneur who entered the Dragons' Den to raise awareness of autism and walked out with £150,000 and an industry expert is looking forward to tailoring global growth.

Scunthorpe businessman Ben Pearson's rags to riches tale wowed the celebrity investors, with plaudits across the board as they heard of the challenges he overcame. Now as contractual details are finalised between him and Touker Suleyman for the 35 per cent investment in plus-size specialist Big Clothing 4 U, he has reflected on [15 minutes of epic television](#) that left viewers in tears.

The 30-year-old said: "It was really good and the aftermath, the outpouring, has been incredible. The amount of people saying they ended up in tears, how it resonates because they have autistic children; I've had former dragons and others who have been on the Dragons' Den, and absolutely no negative sentiments. I thought it would be inevitable, what with the Katie Price connection, I thought I would get something through putting myself out there, but there was nothing."

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His online and mail order retail business, started in 2015, is based on Queensway Industrial Estate, with a 26-strong team, selling to 8XL sizes and occasionally beyond.

Filmed last July, a few hurdles have been cleared around Christmas, before the deal completion, with late March eyed by

Mr Pearson. "We are nearly there," he said, delighted to have secured his number one target. "I think he is very experienced, he has been around the block a few times with the businesses he has got into. He has started, lost everything, started again from scratch, taken others out of administration, taken liabilities on and within a few years had them turning over £30 million. He's a really good guy."



Ben Pearson is working with Katie and Harvey Price after becoing an ambassador with autism charity Anna Kennedy Online. One barrier had been his directors' loans in the firm, from which he draws his salary, with several of the dragons pointing to the balance sheet as a reason for not following up on their praise for his entrepreneurial journey.

"The other dragons pulled a few bits out of the accounts, but he has a good understanding of why business people behave how

they do,” Mr Pearson said. “The two mindsets colliding makes for a really strong team.”

And the entire Scunthorpe operation is delighted with the potential for growth, with exports key. Mr Pearson is looking forward to economies of scale when it comes to delivering.

“International expansion is still the focus, and the expansion in essence, the biggest thing stopping us, is the price. We are not cost-comparative with shipping. Touker has connections with big couriers and can drive it down.”

Of the reaction on the shop floor in Dunlop Way, he said: “It has gone down really well. Having signed a non-disclosure agreement I couldn’t say anything, they knew I had been somewhere, having been to Manchester for two days, they knew it was something for television, but not the extent of it.”

In the hours after the appearance hits on the Big Clothing 4 U website were up almost 5,000 per cent, with hopes the recognition will further boost revenues too.

And becoming the youngest entrepreneur with autism to enter the den was also a source of pride. “My autism was the reason for wanting to go on the show, more than getting the investment,” he said. “It is important to me to spread awareness of people with autism, to understand different disabilities.”

He told how he spoke about being an autism ambassador with [Anna Kennedy OBE](#), a mutual friend of Deborah Meaden, and a factor which also resonated with the dragons, that didn’t make the cut.

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