

Entrepreneur turns her love for tea into a booming business



By Katja Hamilton

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Inspired by her childhood, KwaZulu-Natal born entrepreneur and owner of Ting Tang Teas, Zanda Isaacs, has turned her love for tea into a booming business with a range of antioxidant-rich teas.



Source: Supplied. Zanda Isaacs, founder and owner of Ting Tang Teas.

The range promotes wellness with a variety of products including teas, lattes, tonics and, soon, tea capsules.

This inspiring 25-year old sits down to chat about life, her passion for herbal remedies and the early beginnings of Ting Tang which has taken the market by storm.

■ ***There's a growing trend towards incorporating mindfulness into our daily lives and drinking one's tea slowly and reverently as a practice of serenity. Taking time for oneself amidst the busy-ness of life. How important is this to you and to your target market?***

Zanda Isaacs: Drinking tea is definitely a practice of serenity for me. My first memory of tea was of my mom and my gran and I sitting outside drinking tea with freshly baked scones and biscuits and just chatting, laughing, having girl talk.

It's really such a beautiful memory, so each time I drink tea now I have a smile on my face. It's the perfect way to unwind at the end of a busy day and I feel like anyone who is a tea consumer can attest to that. It's a beautiful way to slow down: you have to wait for your teabag to brew or for the leaves to steep, you have to wait for it to cool down, you smell the aroma, taste the different notes - there's so much sensory stimulation that happens around tea.

For some reason, just the act of stirring your cup when there's tea inside feels so magical. It's a very beautiful practice for me.

■ ***Could you tell me a little about yourself and how you came to start Ting Tang? Why are herbal teas so important to consumers?***

Isaacs: I've been making teas for a very long time. I started when I was very young. I must've been about 8 or 9. My mom used to make herbal teas for us, herbal remedies, to cure ailments such as colds or flus - because she didn't believe in going to the doctor. She believed everything we needed we could get from Nature.

My mom's teas tasted really bad - I hated them. So I took matters into my own hands and started making my own teas, so that I wouldn't drink hers. I grew fond of making my own teas, and realised that there was so much more I could do with them than just cure colds.



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I could make teas for helping with focus, teas to calm my anxiety, teas to help my skin glow, teas for weight loss, for detox. I just started having so much fun experimenting with all the different types, and grew a passion for it.

I would make teas for people and started selling here and there. When I was 19, I decided to take the process more seriously. I asked my mother to invest some money into me.

She invested about R2000 into my company for me to buy some stock and packaging; the rest I had to figure out by myself. So I created a website, I designed my logo, designed my packaging, and launched Ting Tang. A few years later, here we are.

■ ***Has the pandemic awakened people to working with natural remedies and tea blends?***

Isaacs: Definitely. My company reached new heights during the pandemic. We grew exponentially in every way. I do believe largely because people were looking for natural remedies to supply their bodies with new nutrients instead of using the traditional medicines they would get from a pharmacy or a clinic.

That was a very interesting time for me, a really great time, but it also requires discernment because there's a lot more education out there and people are very knowledgeable about natural products, about what and how much of it should be going into their body.

So as someone who considers herself a connoisseur in this field - or rather a stakeholder in this space - I have to be very critical of my own recipes and diligent around product safety, because I don't want to just be putting anything into people's bodies.

People are just so much more aware now. They are reading ingredient labels before they buy products, they want to know how much of something is in what. So I am cautious in product development, while still serving my customers a great tea-drinking experience.

❏ ***Can you tell me about your funding and how you've scaled up your business without having clients lose the personalised experience of tea drinking?***

Isaacs: The funding from the SAB Foundation helped exponentially. We have done so much. A big part of scaling up for us is that we noticed a big gap in the market in terms of teabag packing. We had formerly been doing teabag packing manually for Ting Tang, as we sell teas either in their loose form or in teabags. So for teabag orders, we had to manually seal every teabag which is so very labour intensive.

With the funding, we were able to get a packing machine, which allowed us to automate our packing so we can put an amount of herbs into our machine and it will start packing our sealed teabags for us. That's been awesome.

With our machine, we are able to pack for other small businesses at very competitive pricing. It's been so amazing to help other small businesses do this, and automate their processes as well. It is really rewarding.

I don't think we can ever lose the personalised experience of tea drinking. Our teas are handcrafted and we put so much love and effort into everything we do - it's a family business, it's something we truly are passionate about, so I think that aspect of it can never ever really be lost.

❏ ***What have been the greatest growth points for you in your business?***

Isaacs: Definitely SAB. That one was huge. Being able to secure that kind of placement in the SAB Foundation programme, working with other entrepreneurs, the mentorship, PR opportunities, collaboration opportunities, it's just been amazing. It was such a great way to stretch myself as an entrepreneur and to learn about all other avenues of my business.



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Another big growth point was, early this year in January and February, we had our lowest month in sales, which was very frightening to see. No entrepreneurial owner wants to be in a position where they see their businesses at the lowest they've ever been.

That was hard, but we had to get ourselves out of it. It took a lot to work on it, because it felt like something was always pulling me back, reminding me that I had the worst month. But the experience grew me in such a way that we launched a new product - our tea tonics.

It's basically our tea, but in tonic form. So you can just take a spoon a day instead of having to brew a cup (if you don't have the time, or if you're maybe not a tea fan). Since then it's taken off quite insanely, more than we ever expected, so we're back on our feet. Everything's great right now.

❏ ***Any advice to young people wishing to start a business?***

Isaacs: The first thing is, just start honestly. You don't have to be perfect, you don't have to have everything you need. Start with what you have. That's what I did. I started with R2000 and my computer, and that was enough.

Start gaining confidence, and then on top of that, work hard. It's a lot of hard work but it's so rewarding when you start seeing the returns - and when you start dictating your own hours.

If you don't want to work on a Monday, you don't have to work on a Monday. If you want to go on a holiday for three weeks, you don't have to book leave. You just need to make sure everything's set in your company so you can do so.

The hard work pays off, but you do need to put it in.

▣ ***Where can we find Ting Tang?***

Isaacs: You find Ting Tang online (tingtangtea.co.za), on Takealot (so if you're doing some shopping on Takealot add it to your cart, you won't even have to pay shipping), and at select Spar retailers in Johannesburg and at the Bryanston night markets.

ABOUT KATJA HAMILTON

Katja is the Finance, Property and Healthcare Editor at Bizcommunity.
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