

EP2 - Pip & Nut - Vodafone

SPEAKERS

Claudia Winkleman, Pip Murray

Claudia Winkleman 00:06

Hello, and welcome to business unusual with Vodafone Business. I'm Claudia Winkleman, and I'm talking to founders of businesses who have fought their way to the top of their game, the entrepreneurs whose products outperform expectations. Today I'm meeting a marathon running peanut butter addict who wants spent three months in a shed to focus on just launching her business. Her company makes gorgeous, beautiful palm oil free natural nut butters. They're called Pip & Nut, and they are all about positive energy. In 2013 Pip Murray took a five grand loan from her dad, who by the way charged her interest, bought a blender that she still uses to test new recipes and made a plan to help the planet she's in her London office right now celebrating the company's first year of profit hello hello hello Pip. Thank you so much for joining us

Pip Murray 01:01

How are you? How are you?

Claudia Winkleman 01:03

We have so many questions and I hope we get to do the more Pep let's talk about you and marathons because that's how you discovered that there was a gap in the market How many of you run and you still running today?

Pip Murray 01:15

Yeah, so I've run about nine I believe now I still run a lot today it's one of the things that kind of keeps me sane actually when growing the business, but yeah my the gap in the market and the kind of passion came from I guess being a regular consumer and looking for products that meet my needs and at the time you know I was doing loads and those marathons and needing something that was going to fulfil kind of that you know nutritious breakfast and post run treat.

Claudia Winkleman 01:38

And your post run tree I believe was always peanut butter on toast. But you didn't like the peanut butters in the supermarket aisle you were like 'no hold on a minute this doesn't make sense'.

Pip Murray 01:48

That's right so like I said I very much came at the business from a consumer perspective so the caveat I had no business experience, no food and drink experience whatsoever. And you know, as a consumer when I was shopping the Caspian I was browsing the shelves and store and that every single product that I was trying to pick up in supermarkets at that time contained palm oil a lot of them were really processed and really kind of Americanized and there was nothing in this space that was kind of that

lifestyle brand that you know I'd seen kind of popping up in other other parts other brands that kind of started to kind of fulfil that kind of more lifestyle brand and I remember thinking this products amazing, as it's so delicious, it's like, like they're like really addictive and, and has so much potential yet they're what's being offered to me as a consumer just was rubbish. And I think that's really what kind of set me going really that sort of small niche within what is quite a crowded space. And I'm thinking, you know what, I'll give this a go. And really, from a consumer perspective, like, you know, I have no clue about how things are made in supermarkets. So when I walk around supermarkets now it's totally different experience. But you know, back then I was like how do these products even get made? And so really did take it right back to the basics. And like I said, I bought a blender, literally started it in my kitchen and went from there really.

Claudia Winkleman 03:09

And I love the fact that your dad who I know was brilliantly supportive, went 'five grand to make peanut butter. Fine'. But you have to pay me back in your favour that with interest and what does he say now?

Pip Murray 03:21

It says something about my childhood, doesn't it that my dad did that, but, in so many ways that so much respect for that. And he's always one to sort of make me stand on my own two feet. And that's probably what actually has been one of the things that's made me do what I've done. So yeah, paid it back the interest, he actually told me later down the line, he never expected to see it again. So he did have faith, but not not lots of it I think at the start.

Claudia Winkleman 03:45

So sweet. I need to talk to you about your job title, which might be singularly the best job title I've ever heard.

Pip Murray 03:53

That's right, it's Chief Squirrel. And in fact, everyone in the business has some sort of squirrel name, which is getting harder and harder as we grow.

Claudia Winkleman 04:00

Okay, I'm gonna need more examples.

Pip Murray 04:05

I mean, God, there are so many, so there's Nut Cruncher there is the Nut Collector. There's a Squirrel Enthusiast. There's Deputy Squirrel, and the list goes on. And it's actually one of the first things that as someone joining the business, they have to kind of figure out how they're going to kind of find a squirrel name. And we tend to have a squirrel naming ceremony to try and figure that one out. So yeah, there's 25 of us in the business. That's kind of easy at the moment. But if I think about when we're 50 I honestly don't know what I'm going to call everyone.

Claudia Winkleman 04:35

It's honestly so fantastic. And I think having read about your business, it feels indicative of the atmosphere that you've created within your team. If that makes sense. I know you all have lunch on

Friday, I know that you look after them. Everybody's got a personal plan and you want to look after their well being and just the squirrel name seems to add on top of that.

Pip Murray 04:57

Yeah, and I think when you're really small business, and a growing one at that, I think culture and the kind of team you want to create is the most important thing and and I guess this girl names are just one example of it of one of the ways that we try and say to people, you know, we're not just a regular business, you don't want to just do business as usual. And also fundamentally, like, I've got to believe that work should be fun, you know, you spend so much time at work. And actually, why can't you really enjoy what you do every day and not feel like it's a real drag and actually have, you know, work with people that are like minded, and have fun. And and I think that's a lot about our brand. And when you look at the kind of the identity and our logo and our marketing, like everything's quite playful and silly, and we try not to take ourselves too seriously. And I think even just the small thing where you kind of fight, you're taking the piss out yourself with it with a ridiculous squirrel name, and help set the tone, I think, to everyone in the business. And when people are speaking to us from outside that, you know, we're going to try and do things a little bit differently. And we're going to try and have some fun on the way.

Claudia Winkleman 06:00

I think it's fantastic. Also, some of your 25 are single, just the idea. They're in a bar and somebody says, Can I buy you a drink? And what do you do for a living? And they reply, I'm actually deputy squirrel. That's all I really need to know

Pip Murray 06:14

Wear as a badge of pride

Claudia Winkleman 06:16

Totally Are you joking? If I was a Squirrel Enthusiast, that would be on every t-shirt, hat, pair of jeans I owned. I agree with you. Let me ask you, please, just so people who are listening, go, hold on. But what did they make?

Pip Murray 06:30

Basically, anything that butter, that's us, and everything around our product range is natural, like I said, and we don't use palm oil in our products, which was one of the key things actually, when starting out was thinking about how do we make products that are totally delicious, like makes you want to go back for more, whilst also making people feel really good about themselves? Because actually, they're better for you and healthier and just fundamentally better for the planet as well. So it's the kind of, you know, do good feel good kind of mantra.

Claudia Winkleman 06:57

Absolutely. Talking of that the mantra and the culture of the company being one of the keys to its success. I mean, it's just, it's the opposite of a sausage factory, isn't it?

Pip Murray 07:10

Yeah, could not be more different.

Claudia Winkleman 07:11

How have you managed to maintain the culture, which is so crucial to your business during the pandemic? And working from home? Was it very hard?

Pip Murray 07:20

Yeah, it's definitely been a stretch. And I mean, we were really lucky in lots of ways because our business just sort of exploded overnight, March April, had worse some of the busiest months that we've ever had as, as a company. And I think lucky in the sense that sort of nut butter, peanut butter is something that you tend to eat at home, and you buy it through supermarkets, and they really surged you know, everyone's trying to as you probably remember, just grab things from the shelves and we just saw our demand go through the roof. And so, we were sort of scrambling around really as much as anything else making sure that we could fulfil all the demand and figure out also as a team, how we were going to work remotely, so very grateful in lots of ways for for the fact that we didn't have to kind of turn our business upside down and think how we're going to survive. It was it was kind of complete opposite in fact. But I think certainly, you know, we've got a really young team, you know, most of us live in sort of Central London. And so actually, the experience of working from home is very different from you know, being in a fun office in Shoreditch and actually real struggle I think to feel that because I connectivity and feel like you're kind of a united team and you know, going against everything that's in front of you. So you know, for me, it was just a big focus on trying to make sure that there was still cohesion whilst feeling quite distanced in our own little bubbles. So for instance, I think some of the most important things that we did was making sure that firstly, that there was a lot of communication throughout the business and, and really upping that, typically in the office, you can kind of everything distils by osmosis. But when we went into lockdown, and had to start thinking about things remotely, just making sure that everyone's really in touch with each other, and making sure that they're still connecting with each other, on a kind of day to day kind of more like kind of water cooler moments and making sure they have a space in people's days to be able to catch up with people and just have a coffee and talk about what they're up to and how they're feeling rather than just, it all being about work. I think certainly in the first few months of lockdown, everyone felt like they should be working 24 7 and that was that kind of creep into your your life in terms of work kind of eating into those evening and early mornings. So actually trying to really encourage people to have that structure and balance and take time to kind of look after themselves whilst you know, we're all working really, really hard. And certainly a really challenging time and lots that we didn't get right. But at the same time, I think you know, now we're kind of moving to the kind of hybrid worlds and I think it was definitely take some of the learnings from what we had over the last year about remote working and feeling more, kind of relaxed about people working at home are often is certainly something that we're going to be incorporating into our culture now going forwards.

Claudia Winkleman 09:57

I totally hear you and I think hybrid is the way to go for some people, it really works to be sort of half and a half, or however it works. But what was it like to all them be back in the office? It must have been thrilling.

Pip Murray 10:10

Yeah, I mean, it was amazing. We actually had a, someone left on Thursday last week, and we did a big kind of leaving party and went out. And it was just the first time we've properly as a team been able to do that. And it's just such a nice feeling. And I get such a big energy from like, just being in the office and seeing and chatting to everyone and, and as much as anything else, I think when the problem is when you're all remote is that you end up only speaking to a handful of people that you kind of interact with on a day to day basis. Whereas now you know, you can walk up to people and like, say, make a cup of tea next to them and have a chat to, you know, our Field Sales interns or, you know, have a conversation with someone in our ops team who I might not necessarily have a day to day kind of conversation with. And it's just brought so much more kind of fun and energy into the business. And I'm a bit of a manager that I'd rather people were slightly less productive, but had a little bit more enjoyment and didn't feel that kind of constant pressure to always be on like I'd rather actually sort of sacrifice a little bit of the kind of productivity for a bit more enjoyment, because I think that's really what people particularly in my business are looking for. So they want to be challenged. But they certainly want to still go out with, you know, their work friends on a Thursday night and, you know, enjoy living in London, and that, you know, fun aspect of the company.

Claudia Winkleman 11:27

Can I just tell you, anybody listening to this is going to apply to your office right now. On even if they have a nut allergy? No January, they're coming to the squirrel, the mantra, which is agree ever so slightly less productive, but actually enjoy work feels enormous and, and fantastic. If you don't want to say, let's talk about coaching, because I read that you had a strong mentor relationship, how important is it for Pip & Nut?

Pip Murray 11:55

Yeah, I mean, I think it's critical for anyone starting out in a business is to have, you know, a strong sort of network of peers, but also really a mentor that can really help and coach you along the way. Because, you know, I started this business as a sole founder. So I don't have a co founder and sitting alongside me, which I think is one aspect, which makes it that extra little bit more important to make sure you've got good people around you. And having a mentor allows you to kind of be able to pick up the phone when you really are having this kind of everything's hitting the fan. And yeah, you know, you really kind of hidden hands need to be able to speak really honestly, with someone that's maybe not someone that's working within your business or in your team, but someone that you can kind of ask and get advice from or just just generally download about something that might be happening. So yeah, right from day dot, I had a brilliant mentor. He's actually one of our biggest investors now. So it's kind of our relationships evolved over time. But that kind of journey is one that's so useful to have someone that has that experience, because they're in so many scenarios where you're a little bit messy around the edges, but actually, you know, you know that you're going to get there eventually. And you need someone that really understands and empathises with that kind of state of play, not expecting you to be all over everything and be perfect. But except that you'll you'll probably fail quite a lot. And you'll learn a lot along the way. But you'll get there eventually. So yeah, I think it's incredibly important to have someone that has that experience. And Giles is particularly great, because, you know, he comes with that food and drink lense, so you know, he's helped right the early days, you know, helped me negotiate with Sainsbury's and Tesco is, you know, he'd be on the other end of the line kind of being

like, Oh, I think we should be going in with this pricing and these commercials and all that stuff. So he was so critical in those early days, whereas now our relationship slightly changed, is very much more of a kind of coach and support and helps me kind of with some of my leadership challenges or things around our team. So he's kind of grown with me as I grown. But at different points in sort of our life cycle, you know, we've sort of been able to kind of, well, he's been able to support me, so absolutely integral. And yeah, he's definitely seen all the skeletons in this in the closet and still stuck around. So that's always a good sign. So yeah, he's a brilliant guy. And, you know, I think it's incredibly important to find that that person for you when you're growing that business,

Claudia Winkleman 14:10

He sounds completely wonderful. I don't want to darken our chat. But I imagine it was quite stressful time when you had to recall some product, was Giles there for you then or did you just manage to find the strength and the will? Was it you and the team who went right, this is what we've got to do? Let's just get on and do it.

14:29

Yeah, I mean, absolutely. He was one of the first people that I called when I first found out and kind of had to kind of start thinking about what we were going to do to kind of solve this problem. And it's funny actually, when you have those phone calls, because you expect someone to kind of like lose their shit down the phone and like get really annoyed and angry. And in actual fact, he was completely the opposite and did the great thing which I think any person in business always really appreciate is that he shared a scenario where something even worse happened to him so it almost makes you feel better and be like, okay, So I'm not a complete idiot and didn't completely screw up and actually really sort of helped me you think, okay, fine, I just need to kind of dig in deep and solve the problem step by step, and really just helps me think through what was the next thing that I needed to do to kind of fix what was actually, like I said, pretty stressful moment. And then I think, ultimately, I think, whenever anything like that goes wrong in the company, I think honesty and openness within the business is key, and not holding it all to yourself, but sharing the pain with within the whole team. So yeah, we were quite a small business at that time, when we had that product recall, it was, you know, pretty significant for us in terms of, you know, financial loss, but also just, you know, a really kind of, sort of tipping point for the brand where we were building the business and the real concern that this might have an impact on the business and brand more widely. So yeah, we're about eight people in the company took about sort of six months to fully resolve in terms of figuring it out with our factory and make sure we kind of recouped from the loss that we had, we had to pull basically all the products from all the supermarkets that were in so yeah, it wasn't the easiest of times. But it's funny because you go through those moments where you almost can't see the wood through the trees, and you come out the other side. And it really does make you stronger as a business you get you know how the processes in the company, but you as an individual build up so much resilience. And almost those moments where you felt it may be this is it are actually the moments where once you've managed to get through them, you feel like you've grown as an individual, and you can deal with anything that gets thrown at you. So now, any problems that hit hit, hit the business I tend to not get too flustered. And I'm pretty good at staying pretty cool and calm collected, because actually, that probably was the lowest of the low during the last six years at that particular moment when we have that product recall. And ever since you know nothing has been comparable. And so it's felt like you know, pretty plain sailing. So you can actually be that support for

other members of your team. When they have problems, which they're really struggling with, you can actually kind of have the space and the knowledge, I guess to know that you can support them and tell them that they'll probably they'll get through this too. And that through it. They'll learn something new too.

Claudia Winkleman 17:10

Absolutely. And through this podcast, which I love because I talk to such inspirational entrepreneurs and founders. So many of them have said exactly what you said, which is you've got to trip because you've got to get back up again. And whether it's what you went through or all kinds of different businesses I'm talking to so it's never going to just be easy peasy plain sailing because what is?

Pip Murray 17:33

Yeah, exactly. And yeah, I think only by failing, do you actually start to understand what you need to do. Sometimes it's a good it's absolutely a good thing that it happens even if that moment in time it doesn't feel like it.

Claudia Winkleman 17:48

More from my chat with Pip in just a moment. First I want to introduce an exciting new initiative from Vodafone Business. In the last year, there's been a huge rise in the need for businesses to get online. Small and Medium Enterprises make up 99.9% of the UK business population. founders and entrepreneurs have never had so many decisions to make when it comes to technology. digital skills are more important than ever, but at least a third of small business owners in the UK said they aren't sure which tools will best suit their needs. Many haven't invested in any digital support. Some have only the most basic cybersecurity. That's why Vodafone have introduced business dot connected a free online training programme to support 100,000 businesses across the UK. It offers free webinars, workshops, and online training modules. There are different levels of upskilling to cater to those just starting that online journey as well as businesses looking to build on existing experience. Find out more by Vodafone business, online knowledge and Resource Centre V Hub where you can sign up to business connected and connect your business to the free tools and training. You need to digitally transform search Vodafone Business V Hub. You're listening to me Claudia Winkleman while I talk to Pip Murray, founder of the most delicious Pip & Nut. Let me ask you what is your advice for people who have a business idea? If you could get to talk to the you from six years ago? What would you tell her?

Pip Murray 19:24

That's such a good question. Yeah, I mean, my advice probably to my younger self would be I think have a bit more patience with yourself and and not be quite so hard on yourself. I think. I think often typically and I don't know if it's a female trait or anyone starting a business but certainly my experience is that I can be incredibly hard on myself when things don't go right. And actually sometimes you just need a bit of patience to wait and keep pushing basically. You know, for me that for instance, one example is that we're sold in all the retailers throughout the UK but the only one that we haven't been able to cinch the deal on is Waitrose. And then we've been trying for about six years, and I really had to have that kind of patience and resilience to kind of stick with it, because it is the most frustrating thing, when you find that, you know, you don't win a listing, you don't get the next big deal that you're hoping for. And really, you just have to keep accepting a no as never know. And eventually it'll turn into a Yes,

and I think sometimes, certainly in the kind of six years that I've been growing a business, I've been incredibly hard myself and think of myself when things haven't gone quite to plan. And sometimes about that, that's been a deal breaker. But actually, that's one example of many that I can think of that, actually persistence and just sticking to your guns and keeping trying is really all you need. So yeah, I'd say that would probably be my my biggest tip, but then I, if I have, if I can have a second, I think, particularly when you're starting out, I think one of the most important things is, is to really just get going. And I think often when you've got an idea in your head, you'll roll it around for months and months and months and months, and you won't take any action on it. And it will frustrate you because you want to be completely perfect to what's most your business is already fully formed and, and thriving. Actually, you know, sometimes all you need to do is just start and get the idea out your head. And you know, when things I think I did actually pretty well go when I first started out was you know, initially started the business literally making in my kitchen with a blender and I took the products down to a market stall and it had some very cheap and cheerful branding around the outside of the jars. And it really just got the ball moving and starts to make something feel which was quite abstract in my mind something that was quite tangible and real and gave you those sort of positive feedback loops. So you know, people were buying it, and liking it and giving me great feedback. And it gave me exactly the kind of confidence that I needed to kind of do the next step, which was, you know, scale up manufacturing and figure out how to make the product that was suitable for a supermarket. So if you've got an idea, think about what's the minimum that you need to do to get it out the door without, you know, spending your mortgage on it and and get going and give it a try and accept the fact that at that stage, it's probably not, you know, the perfect business that you've had in your mind from a brand or, you know, proposition perspective. But it's, it's it's starting, is really half the battle.

Claudia Winkleman 22:17

Fantastic. Honestly, people will be lapping that up going, Okay, I'm just doing it. As a company, you signed up to an initiative that balances purpose and profit, and intends to use business as a force for good. What does that mean day to day for the business? And in the long term?

Pip Murray 22:37

So yeah, we focus on the triple bottom line, so people planet and profits. So I guess some businesses might just consider when they're thinking about different products that they're going to launch or different marketing they're going to do, and they might just be thinking, how is this going to drive profit? How am I going to drive my bottom line, whereas when we as a business, think about decisions that we're making? We're thinking about how does this impact the environment has this impact the planet, and can we do it better, and we're also thinking about our people. And that's both our team, but also the wider community that we operate within. So take, for example, some of the things that we do, we're working on becoming a net zero business by 2030. So effectively, reducing our carbon emissions in line with the Paris agreements, 1.5 degrees centigrade. And also, you know, using offsets where we can, we can't necessarily reduce, to make sure that we hit net zero. And that's, that's a big task, and it's going to cost us quite a lot of money to get there. And it will require lots of resource to do it. But we believe it's the right thing to do for as a business. That's, you know, who, you know, climate change. We've all seen the news lately that it's very real. And it's very possible that if we don't start to take some action, that we're going to have some serious consequences. So that's sort of one example where actually, as a business, we don't need to do, it might not actually do anything from a kind of, you know,

brand perspective, but we think it's fundamentally the right thing to do from a business perspective, from a responsible business perspective. And, you know, we're also thinking about how as a business, can we, you know, support our local community as we grow and become a more thriving business, we want to make sure we're giving back so we've worked quite closely with Hackney Food Bank over the last two years, and continue will continue to do so indefinitely. With wider kind of food bank initiatives about how do we as business because funnily enough peanut butter is actually one of the things which in every kind of emergency food parcel that is given out from Hackney food bank or food banks more broadly, it's actually one of the things that is included within those emergency food parcels for people that are really vulnerable. So we thought, well, what's one of the things that we can do actually helps and supports those maybe couldn't necessarily afford our products? And also those that really can't afford necessarily their day to day food is to actually donate product. And so this year, we'll be donating over 40,000 jars to our local food bank. And I hope in time as we grow, we'll be able to continue to scale that, that number. So some of those things are just, I guess, some of the initiatives that we do as business. But really, like I said, whenever we're making decisions from a product perspective, we'll be thinking, how do we make sure this is light on the planet as possible? How can we make sure that we're doing right by, you know, everyone, and therefore, I guess, as a business, embodying that, that phrase, which is using your business as a force for good, and I think it's genuinely one of the most empowering things actually running a business, where you feel that you're actually having a really positive impact more widely, and you have a platform that you can use to shout about some of the things which you care about. So whilst we're not the biggest company out there, I hope that some of the things that we do inspires also other businesses to think differently about how they approach business, and to be a more socially responsible, environmentally responsible company.

Claudia Winkleman 26:09

Pip Murray you are an excellent human being. Thank you so much for talking to us. And thank you to all your squirrels, I can't I'm obsessed by the squirrels in creating this product. Uh, well, I mean, I'd very full squirrel costume. Usually I can't come there because I'd be too squirrely. Can I please ask? I'm going to enter two quickfire questions if that's all right. What three words would you use to describe Pip & Nut?

Pip Murray 26:37

I would use squirrel-ly it's got to be I'm going to pick that one from you. I would say ambitious. And I would also say caring are the three words I would use to describe the brand.

Claudia Winkleman 26:54

That's fantastic. And what three things couldn't Pip & Nut survive without

Pip Murray 26:59

Well, couldn't survive without peanuts and almonds. So I'm gonna say that one first. couldn't survive without my amazing team. They are absolute incredible and they make me look good every single day and so I owe them a lot, and I couldn't do without now our consumers. I don't know if anyone follows us on social media but if you do, you'll notice how crazy they are. They are absolutely addicted to our products and our brand and I find everyday they bring me a bit of joy when I see kind of the tweets and Instagrams that they send to us so yeah our fans as well.

Claudia Winkleman 27:37

Fantastic. Pip thank you so much for talking to me. And I wish you enormous luck for your future is properly exciting. It's already smashed it and did you say that you're not stocked you're still not stocked in Waitrose?

Pip Murray 27:51

Still not stocked in Waitrose.

Claudia Winkleman 27:52

Okay, so this is just a public information announcement to Waitrose. If they're listening. I don't know. Maybe they're busy. You need Pip & Nut. You need Pip & Nut Waitrose. We need it. I've got one near me. I'll come and I'll buy it or you'll be happy with me. I'll come by all dressed as a squirrel or so holding a blender, which I will call Bob. Thank you again.

Pip Murray 28:14

Thank you so much. It's been great talking to you.

Claudia Winkleman 28:21

We all need a magic blender and indeed a squirrel title. It is remarkable and a sign of real change just how passionate the people I've spoken to in this series are about the planet about sustainability. And the way business leaders can really make a difference. Next time on Business Unusual from Vodafone Business. An entrepreneur whose latest brand took more than 10,000 pounds on its very first day when it turned its digital audience into customers. We would love you to rate and review the podcast and please subscribe to hear more from the UK most inspiring entrepreneurs. Thank you so much for listening.