



The Purple Door

After many years of watching his wife making soap to help ease their children's eczema, Carlow entrepreneur Damian O'Brien decided to set up the Purple Door. Using simple ingredients, demand for the locally produced products is steadily increasing and with the assistance and support from IT Carlow, the company is exporting their naturally fragranced bars of soap including the best-selling Champagne & Angels and their newest Patchouli & Bergamot range.

Luxurious soap using natural, sustainable ingredients for the discerning, ecologically aware customer who prefers a touch of luxury and a high quality product at a reasonable price, the Purple Door soap and beauty range offer luxurious products manufactured locally and ethically using only sustainable ingredients. Unlike mass produced soap and beauty products, the company designs and manufactures products that are free of chemicals, containing only natural base oils and essential oils which have not been stripped of their natural glycerin content.

According to entrepreneur Damian O'Brien, "Our products differ from other manufacturers because we do not use any chemicals with the exception of Sodium Hydroxide which, for three hundred years, has been the only chemical used in soap manufacture. Other ingredients used such as goat's milk and beeswax are sourced from organic suppliers." The company participated on IT Carlow's New Frontiers Programme which supports and develops early stage businesses that have the potential to be transformed into High Potential Start Up companies (HPSU). The Programme assigns mentors to each entrepreneur and Damian O'Brien finds this aspect particularly helpful in developing his business. The enterprise is expanding and O'Brien states "We have begun to make an impact in health shops, hair and beauty salons and upmarket gift shops. We have also identified hotels and restaurants that are looking to source locally and nationally manufactured products for their establishments. More importantly, we are starting to build an export market for the Purple Doors products. With an increase in the new Diaspora, we have found opportunities for our products in North America, Australia, New Zealand and closer to home in the United Kingdom. We also sell our range of products online.' The company is also increasing their product line introducing new fragranced soaps, lip balms and liquid soaps to the market. The product line is making an impact in the local market as they are manufactured in Ireland. With increasing globalisation, the company has found that customers are seeking locally manufactured high quality products at a price that, while reasonable, does not approach the prices achieved during the Celtic Tiger years.

Their market research has also found that customers are extremely cost conscious and their products need to be priced accordingly. Participation on the New Frontiers Programme at IT Carlow was not the company's first experience of working with the college. Before joining the Programme in April 2012, the Purple Door worked closely with the Institute's **DesignCORE** research group on the company's branding, design and packaging which has had a positive impact on getting the range of products to market.