

Director of the month

Sarah Orecchia

Founder, UnBEElievable Health

It was while living between London and New York that a combination of damp weather, constant travelling for work and bringing up children left Sarah Orecchia feeling constantly run down and unwell. As a natural-health enthusiast, she started to speak to nutritionists for recommendations on what she could take to build up her immunity – which is when she came across propolis, the resin collected by bees.

This, along with news on the alarming decline in bee populations, spurred Orecchia to launch UnBEElievable Health in 2010. “I had been thinking for a long time about starting a supplements business based on health from the hive,” she says. “But I also wanted my business to have a higher purpose, so I thought ‘how wonderful to do something where we can donate a portion of proceeds to bee causes.’”

Starting with just two staff, Orecchia experimented with various ingredients, including propolis, elderberry and olive leaf to find the right combination. “We wanted a solid formula that would be year-round. Our supplements are great for colds, but also have anti-histamine and anti-inflammatory properties – so they’re also good for hay fever.”

Orecchia used her savings to fund the business, but admits she hadn’t anticipated just how much money it would require. “When it came down to doing my business plan and forecast, I suddenly realised what it was really going to cost to start a business like this.”

She was advised that the business would need to spend up to a £1,000 a year on PR and marketing alone. “We couldn’t



afford that,” she says, adding that social media has provided a useful free alternative. “We never had any problem getting into stores but it was about getting the word out there – so we do a lot on social media and get bloggers to write about us.”

The company also suffered a setback when it received a batch of unsatisfactory products. “The manufacturer thought that, as a small business, we wouldn’t spend the money to do an analysis – but we did and found that the primary ingredient wasn’t even in there.” As it takes six to eight weeks to receive each batch, stores were left without stock. “We went two months where we couldn’t fill orders.”

Having resolved the supply chain issues, four years on UnBEElievable Health has six employees and is stocked in more than 600 stores around the world, including Whole Foods Market and Holland & Barrett, recording a £210,000 turnover. “Sales have more than doubled every year since we started. Next year we are anticipating nearly tripling.”

A new product is planned for launch later this year, and a second will follow in 2015. “Our next product will be a natural energy supplement with bee pollen and a blend of other nutrients and super-foods.” The company also plans to launch in the Middle East soon.

“In five years I’d be delighted if our supplements were being sold in the US,” says Orecchia. “I’d love for Whole Foods to say ‘we will do an exclusive deal with you’. They donate a lot to charity; it would be great to work with them.”

www.unbelievablehealth.co.uk

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

My inspiration...

Who? Roxanne Quimby, who started Burt's Bees. She had a vision and built up this wonderful natural skincare company based around bees.

Social media

Twitter. Social media is mind-blowing. The way you can contact people that five years ago you would have had to go through 10 different agents to speak to is amazing.

Best book I really love *Anything You Want* by Derek Sivers. There's zero fluff, it's just all this incredible advice for entrepreneurs boiled down to an essence.



Favourite place It's corny but I love London. I moved here from Mississippi when I was 19 to go to university and stayed.

Brand Whole Foods Market. I love their ethos – they value the

workforce and believe in the importance of a higher purpose in business; one of the co-founders started the Conscious Capitalism movement.

Influential figure

Jamie Oliver. He's all for children eating more healthily and has made it cool for men to cook (women worldwide owe him thanks!) And he battled with McDonald's and won.