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Kicking up a stink pays off for inventor

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When Asda failed to reply to Daniel Woolman's requests for a meeting so that he could show off his new invention, he sat in the lobby until a member of the buying department agreed to see him.

Now the supermarket has placed a monthly order for his wheelie bin hygiene product.

Launching a new venture is a big mountain to climb in today's tough, risk-averse climate, but entrepreneur Daniel Woolman has overcome the challenging market to launch a new wheelie bin freshener.

The Leeds University graduate has spent the last two years developing Binifresh, a device designed to fit inside a wheelie bin and emit a purposely formulated spray every four hours to ensure the bin stays fresh and hygienic.

Mr Woolman, 26, said: "It started when I was at university. I lived in Hyde Park and Headingley.

"I noticed that when people were putting rubbish in their bins they would put the bag in with their hands stretched out so they didn't have to go near it, or open up the bin with the rubbish bag.

"I thought, 'how many people up and down the country are doing this to avoid their bin?'"

With all the media attention surrounding wheelie bin hygiene in the UK and fortnightly collections, it soon became clear to Mr Woolman this was an interesting market worth exploring.

Added to this situation is the current bin strike in Leeds.

The row over a new pay and grading review, which all local authorities have had to carry out, has been going on for over a week leaving some residents and businesses with a mountain of growing rubbish.

Mr Woolman has conducted extensive market research, spent two years in product development, and patented the product internationally while raising £250,000 of private investment.

He said: "When I came out of university, I was left with the question of what I was going to do and I decided to go on my own and I took the idea to two investors – people I knew or had been introduced to."

Outsourcing to keep overheads low, Mr Woolman has created a team of product engineers, industrial designers, model makers, tool makers and lawyers to turn the vision into a reality.

The result is a product which automatically neutralises and eliminates odours from rubbish, as well as killing bacteria on the surface of the bin, using their purposely-formulated refills.

The plastic part of the product is manufactured in China, while the refills are manufactured in the UK.

Binifresh was accepted for sale in Lakeland a few weeks ago and sold more than 300 units in the first three weeks with no advertising.

More than 10,000 units have now been sold to date.

The product is also listed with John Lewis and will be launched nationwide in all Asda stores next week.

Asda was a huge hurdle which Mr Woolman managed to overcome.

When he struggled to obtain a meeting with one of the supermarket's buyers he decided to adopt a maverick attitude instead, travelling from his London base to camp on the doorstep of its head office in Leeds until someone in the buying department agreed to meet him.

He said: "I couldn't speak to who I needed to speak to at Asda, I wasn't their priority.

"So I came up to Leeds and told them I wanted to speak to someone. "They said 'don't be so ridiculous' but I stayed and eventually one of the assistant buyers came down.

"She got me a meeting and very soon I got listings in every single Asda store."

Mr Woolman has ambitious plans for Binifresh and says he hopes to secure more listings in more supermarkets and other retailers.

In addition, he plans to export to the US, Australia, UK and develop more products.

Sweet smell of success

For Daniel Woolman, an interest in business has always been prominent.

At school, he imported sweets from Costco and sold them to his classmates, bringing Big Red Cinnamon Gum to his school playground years before it launched in the UK.

He had his first product idea while at Leeds University and convinced the chemistry department to help, raising enough money from friends and family to get a full-time researcher assigned to it.

The end result was not commercially viable but he said the experience taught him valuable lessons in research and development, market research and fund-raising.

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