

Ethically-sourced, sustainable, premium quality synthetic hair extensions, meet Tiwani Heritage

As part of a series about Virgin StartUp's Collective Impact programme, Maddyness spoke to Lola Cawood and Carol Lathbridge, cofounders of Tiwani Heritage.

Temps de lecture : minute

5 October 2023

What was the catalyst for launching Tiwani Heritage?

We became tired of the lack of premium beauty brands that put natural afro hair at the forefront and actually celebrate its beauty. There are and were many brands for whom afro hair was more of an afterthought. Further, the level of customer service we were receiving as consumers left a lot to be desired and we knew we could do better

Can you share your elevator pitch?

Tiwani Heritage offers a range of recyclable and sustainable hair extensions, changing the afro hair extensions game by empowering our customers to make better and healthier beauty choices

Can you tell our readers about your engagement with Virgin StartUp?

We successfully applied for a small startup loan to help us get started.

Through the loan, we were introduced to the amazing resources available through the Virgin StartUp community, including mentorship, webinars and masterclasses. We came across the Virgin StartUp/Crowdcube Collective Impact program and applied for a place, which we were so excited to get. Our relationship with Virgin StartUp has thrived from there, and so many opportunities have come our way, which have helped to develop not only our business, but us as entrepreneurs too

Tell us about the working culture at Tiwani Heritage

It's quite relaxed because we are both mums and we're sure that many will agree that it's a juggling act! So while our work ethic is strong and our goals ambitious, we need to be realistic too. One of the best things about being a duo is that when one of us is too bogged down, the other can usually help to lighten the load by taking more on. So while the pressure of running a business alongside everything else may be high at times, we manage to keep our heads above water

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

Definitely the funding side of things- I mentioned that we are ambitious and have so many ideas, but only so much working capital. Raising funds is challenging and a real slow dance when it comes to finding the right investor, without compromising on your vision or diluting your equity too early. There are also challenges associated with potential investors 'getting' our mission- as it could be viewed as quite a niche product and market. But we have made so many great connections that have led to wonderful opportunities- so it is also a numbers game (excuse the pun!)

What's in store for the future?

Definitely launching our plant based collection. We are so proud of it and we know our customers will love it. This collection provides a real and tangible alternative to synthetic hair extensions, helping to reduce the landfill and health issues posed by plastic synthetic hair

Can you talk about why you put purpose at the centre of building Tiwani Heritage?

When doing our due diligence, we were shocked to learn that the hair extensions we had been using for so many years were actually made of non biodegradable plastic that will undoubtedly end up in landfill and outlive us all. By our estimation, approximately 21,000 tonnes is being dumped in the UK alone, with global figures terrifying. We also see that people of colour are not often at the forefront of conversations about sustainability and we wanted to change that. We felt it was our responsibility to help educate and empower our community

What barriers have you faced in realising your entrepreneurial ambitions? How can we make entrepreneurship more accessible in the UK?

Definitely the funding challenges already described. Also realising the wealth of resources and organisations out there set up to help people like us who have a dream and want to make it happen. When we first started out we naively thought we had to do it all alone, and that makes it a very daunting prospect. It's hard to know where to start. But tapping into the community at VSU has really opened our eyes to the fact that there is a lot of help out there. So making these organisations and visible as

possible is crucial

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

If you have an idea, don't sit on it, go for it! Go at your own pace, but don't wait for it to be 'perfect' before you jump in, or the opportunity may pass you by as perfect does not exist. And try not to do everything at once! Break it down into tangible steps that will help you achieve your goals

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

Self care, self care and self care! 'Me time' is so crucial, especially as a mum. Burnout is inevitable if you're not looking after yourself- so build it in, in whatever way you can. Regular self care will make you so much more likely to succeed in whatever you put your hand to.

Lola Cawood and Carol Lathbridge are the cofounders of *Tiwani Heritage*.

Article by Lola Cawood & Carol Lathbridge