



## **Slim Secrets – Healthy snack alternatives**

This case study explores a micro food bar business based in Melbourne – Slim Secrets. It highlights the strict regulatory and packaging issues the food business faced in taking its products overseas.

### **Case Study**

The philosophy behind Slim Secrets is to provide consumers with healthy snack alternatives for most occasions and as well as lifestyle and healthy eating secrets. The business idea came from experience that Sharon Thurin, Managing Director, gained in a health and wellness clinic where she saw a need for consumers to have a tasty, healthy snack alternative that was balanced and well priced.

Sharon talked to people and investigated the market. She checked her competition in the supermarket to ensure that her concept was new and then spent two to three months finding the right people to work with her in the business. Sharon developed relationships with many people who helped develop the brand and some of the concepts. She met with Janine Ellis from Boost Juice, who gave her helpful hints on legal issues, and Austrade gave her export advice.

Sharon established Slim Secrets as a private company. She is the sole director and works from a home office for a balanced lifestyle. She had quite a few legal hurdles in the highly regulated food industry as food businesses cannot make any health claims. Sharon received legal advice on the Slim Secrets brand name and removed the word 'healthy' from the back of the packet.

With her micro business model Sharon runs the business with her Blackberry, but subcontracts out most elements: contract warehouse, manufacturer, distributors and bookkeeper. She looks after marketing although she also uses a PR company.

The first range of Slim Secrets bars were designed, with help from nutritionists, for specific times of day, for example, Morning Rev Up and Afternoon Snack Attack. These bars are wheat free, high in protein and fibre but are low GI with approximately three grams of fat per bar, so they have very balanced nutritional profile.

Slim Secrets brought out another range of bars, called Nutrient Secrets, which contain less than 100 calories and are gluten free with added nutrients, such as flax seed and ginkgo. Both ranges of bars have won healthy eating awards.

Sharon positioned Slim Secrets as a niche product for health conscious females but has found that 40 per cent of customers are male. One of the reasons for the Slim Secrets' brand success is that it is accessible in many different outlets and there are more opportunities for these products than many other food products. They are on sale

in health food stores, Fitness First gyms, Boost Juice stores, supermarkets and also in certain cafes. Some fitness trainers also sell them.

At the beginning Sharon intended that Slim Secrets would be a very small business, a hobby and she did not think about going global, but within three months of launch, she was approached by a distributor in New Zealand and that opened up some doors. She then worked with Austrade to open up other areas of export.

Sharon experienced the difficulty of adapting products for certain overseas markets, for example, it took three months to finalise the wording on packaging for Singapore. She also decided to get Halal accreditation to help her products sell in Singapore and many other overseas markets. She needed bi-lingual packaging for Canada, as its nutritional panel is very different from the Australian panel, and she required permission from a different food authority in Canada for the Mintabolism Boost Bar as it contains green tea.

Sharon uses a range of market entry strategies. For the USA, New Zealand and Singapore she uses a distributor, in China she sells directly to the City Shop supermarket which uses its own consolidator, in Canada she has an agent who organises all the Canadian distributors and in the UK she sells directly to a retailer.

Sharon expects the Slim Secrets brand to develop very quickly, but how quickly and how large it grows depends on whether or not she is willing to let go, to let other people into the business management.

Visit the web site at [www.slimsecrets.com.au](http://www.slimsecrets.com.au).

## Links

- USA Food and Drug Administration site at [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)
- Austrade video clip advising caution when using agents in the UK, *Exporting to the UK 2*, at [www.austrade.au/studentcentre](http://www.austrade.au/studentcentre)
- Our video clip about food security in Japan, *Japan – Food Security*, at [www.austrade.au/studentcentre](http://www.austrade.au/studentcentre).