



TOP 10 INNOVATORS

PASSION AND PURPOSE

To be an entrepreneur takes more than just a great idea and a support system to back it up. It means having the passion and the drive to see that idea through to fruition – something that separates the true innovators from, well, the rest of us. • This year, in researching the companies we would feature in our annual Top 10 Innovators report, we came across a select number of operators we felt captured the spirit of what it meant to be an entrepreneur. To be an entrepreneur means being committed to achieving your goals. It means spending long hours researching and developing prototype products, conducting consumer studies, and working with manufacturers and designers until your formulations and packaging are just right. And finally, it means tirelessly promoting your products at industry trade shows and in retail markets. • Regardless of the differences in their products, all of the entrepreneurs profiled in this year's Top 10 are true originals – trailblazers in their respective sectors and product categories – and all have a genuine passion for their product, their company and their vision.

NUT 'N BUDDER
OTTAWA, ONT.

He's No Nut

BY CAROL NESHEVICH



When Howard Goldenberg used to hear stories about people who risked everything to follow their dreams, he always thought, “Why on earth would anyone do that?” Today Goldenberg understands. He’s put everything — including all of his savings — into bringing his new peanut butter to the market. Called Nut ‘N Budder, his product isn’t a household name yet, but it’s definitely starting to show commercial promise. And Goldenberg is thrilled with his decision to make that tough leap into the entrepreneurial world. “You just have to persevere,” he says. “If there’s a roadblock, move that roadblock.”



It all began at the gym a couple of years ago. Goldenberg’s brother is a strength training coach in Ottawa with a number of professional hockey players as clients. One day Goldenberg noticed a player putting peanut butter in his protein shake after a workout. “He started telling me that peanut butter is very high in protein,” says Goldenberg. “He said it gave him a quick burst of energy. But he didn’t like the natural stuff.” Goldenberg was surprised to see this professional athlete — who is typically quite concerned with what he puts into his body — using peanut butter containing additives and preservatives. “It got me thinking that there’s got to be a better way of doing this.”

So Goldenberg, who was then — and continues to be — a full-time systems specialist at IBM in Ottawa, began to devote all his free time to developing a healthy peanut butter. Aiming to create a great-tasting product with no additives, preservatives or salt, the entrepreneur spoke to myriad peanut butter fans across the continent, uncovering what they liked and disliked about most natural peanut butters. The main complaints he heard were that the taste is often bland, and that the oil separates from the peanut butter, leaving a rock-hard centre that “breaks your wrist when you try to stir it.”

Armed with this feedback, Goldenberg began tirelessly experimenting with recipes, and eventually came up with the perfect — albeit unusual — blend, which includes peanuts, almonds, honey, flaxseed and flaxseed oil, without preservatives or salt. Everyone who taste-tested it began urging him to sell it. “What everyone likes about my product is its unique flavour. Nobody’s ever tasted anything like it before,” says

Goldenberg. “People tell me it’s addictive.” He says it also has a nice consistency, and doesn’t suffer from the “wrist-breaking” problem that many natural peanut butters have. Admittedly, Nut ‘N Butter is a little liquidy because it doesn’t have any additives or preservatives. “But you just need to put it in the fridge and let it chill up a bit, and it thickens up to a nice, spreadable peanut butter,” says Goldenberg.

While Goldenberg had some experience in the foodservice industry, he knew little about the food production business. So a year and a half ago he made the wise move of getting involved with the Guelph Food Technology Centre (GFTC) in Guelph,

Ont. “They took my recipe and helped me commercialize it,” says Goldenberg, noting that the GFTC helped with everything from tweaking the recipe for mass production, to designing packaging and labels, and developing a marketing strategy. “Everyone there was great,” he gushes. The GFTC also gave him credibility with certain retailers who wouldn’t have given him the time of day prior to his affiliation with the centre.

Under the company name Pro Butter Inc., Goldenberg finally had a product that was ready to hit the stores about a year ago. Sobeys’ stores across Ontario now carry Nut ‘N Budder, as do numerous health food stores in Ottawa and throughout Quebec (retailing for \$7.99 a jar). In the past year, sales have reached the \$15,000 mark, and Goldenberg is projecting approximately \$125,000 in sales for 2007 as the product reaches more stores and he begins his full-scale marketing efforts. The entrepreneur isn’t content to stop at just the one recipe either, and is already toying with other flavours, including a dark chocolate peanut butter. “It’s still healthy, because dark chocolate is good for you,” he says.

Despite the fact that many schools are now banning peanut products due to allergies, Goldenberg has no worries about the future of peanut butter. Based on his own extensive research throughout North America, he found that most households still consume a great deal of peanut butter. Besides, Goldenberg’s enthusiasm for Nut ‘N Budder is contagious, driven by a zeal equal to any of the professional athletes his brother works with. “It’s go hard or go home,” he says with a laugh. [FC]

Photo: Pat McGrath, Ottawa Citizen