

Inventive toothpaste dispenser idea receives large funding, needs retail support

Frustrated with cleaning spilt toothpaste after the kids had brushed their teeth, Port Elizabeth house mom Amelia Boggenpoel pitched in 2007 what seemed to be a silly idea at the time, that of inventing a toothpaste dispenser to husband Vernon.



She came up with a bright idea of a toothpaste dispenser that would not only dispense 99% of the content, but would also hamper the "nightmarish sight of toothpaste spilt all over the place after the kids had used the bathroom."

She began working on the concept for the dispenser, initially designing one from wood but later settling for plastic as the ideal material. She then had to sell the idea to various funders, retailers and investors. Although some have been sceptical of the idea, the Boggenpoels threw everything they had into turning the idea into a resounding success.

"I proposed the idea to my husband and he embraced the invention. Together, we then dedicated our focus into making a success of the idea, so much so, that we sold our house last year to invest into the idea.

"Determined to see through the invention, we eventually approached a designer, Andrew Gilmore, who sketched the final concept. On completion, the design was sent to a China-based manufacturer, Huli Xiamen Duchy Industrial Designs that created the first prototype."

On receipt of the prototype, the Boggenpoels approached the Eastern Cape Development Corporation (ECDC) for assistance with the development of moulds on which to manufacture samples of the toothpaste dispenser.

"The Boggenpoels came to us with a prototype, to which we offered industrial trial support which entailed developing the moulds. In addition to this, we provided business support for product packaging and access to markets, which amounted to R200,000," says ECDC business advisor, Wendy Hempe.

One hundred samples were distributed to consumers on trial and, upon receiving positive feedback from the users, the Boggenpoels advanced to mass production. They then approached a locally based plastic manufacturer in hope of selling the proudly South African product to renowned retailers. Nearly 1000 dispensers were produced, from which just over 250 were sold. The targeted retailers showed little interest in the product, reasoning that they did not have a market for it yet.

"Our enthusiasm and plans were almost vanquished by the lack of response from the targeted retailers, as each door we knocked on seemed like a dead end. Although we have approached a number of them without any positive feedback, we are still very optimistic about our invention," she says.

In an effort to get the patented product to the market, the Boggenpoels have been setting up promotional stalls at local malls, selling their product to willing consumers. The feedback received bore proof that the concept had enough potential.

"We have received great reviews from our niche market so far; with most telling us what a wonderful concept this was and how it had improved their homes, has really been encouraging," concludes Amelia.

Hempe says that she hopes to see the project securing a bigger market, in the form of outlets such as Game, Dischem, Clicks, etc. "ECDC support for the project could result in a factory being built, funded by our investment unit which would result in job creation within the province," she added.

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