

Proven innocent

Richard Reed, *Innocent Drinks*



In 1999 Richard Reed and two college friends set up Innocent Drinks to fulfil a wish to go into business and make something 'pure and unadulterated'. Their fruit smoothies and yoghurt drinks have flourished in a highly competitive product sector, are sold at Harrods and served everywhere from the celebrity drying-out clinic, the Priory, to on board North Sea oil rigs.

The drinks are distinctively branded which imitators have since followed but the quality of the product itself is less readily copied. 'We make them this way because we drink eight of them a

day, says Reed. The straightforwardness clearly works for many of Innocent's customers, down to the lady who sent the logo in needlework in homage to the brand.

Reed recites eight refreshingly ingenuous lessons learnt from his experience of growing the business:

1. Keep the main thing, the main thing. This standard advice, gleaned from a management course, is reinforced by a poster on Reed's office wall, showing the headquarters of an American shopping basket manufacturer – an eight-storey building shaped like a shopping basket, complete with handles.
2. Keep things nice and simple. Innocent's approach to market research provides an illustration. To test the viability of the concept they took a stall at a festival and asked people to try the drinks, indicating whether or not the Innocent team should give up their day jobs by tossing the empties into bins labelled 'yes' or 'no'. Similarly, when seeking capital – too little to interest venture capital organisations – Reed sent an email to friends asking if they knew anyone rich. Amazingly, it worked.
3. Worry about reality, not image.

4. Make it easy for other people to make friends with you. This is good advice for companies unable or unwilling to spend large sums of money reaching people through advertising or elaborate sales promotion schemes. Innocent's packs invite calls, and the company welcomes visitors to 'Fruit Towers' – and they come.

5. Be consistent. Reed puts a fresh spin on the usual obsession with ensuring uniform appearance of the brand. 'It's not necessary for everything to look the same; but everything should be such as to make the consumer feel the same.'

6. Pay a lot for a little before you pay a little for a lot. In other words, don't be afraid to make an expensive mistake first time around, as long as you learn from it before scaling up for volume production.

7. Sweat the detail. Innocent's bottle caps don't say 'Use by...'; they say 'Enjoy by...'. After all, you don't use a soft drink, you enjoy it – or should.

8. Spot the good advice.

All in all, it comes down to this: 'Do a thousand things well! Then you have some protection. It's impossible to patent a simple fruit drink – 'God would have something to say about that' – and so Innocent must accept the competition, including the blatant imitator Angel complete with its derivative halo logo. It has copied a couple of Innocent's successful innovations. That still leaves Innocent with 998 more.