



## Case Study Elephant Chilli Sauce

### Sadia Yusuf and Elephant Chilli Sauces

Sadia Yusuf is the owner-founder (and sole employee) of Elephant Chilli Sauces. A Bristol-based food lover with Somalian and Kenyan roots, her sauce company has stared failure in the face and refused to take no for an answer. Twice! Now firmly on the right track, Sadia is about to launch a duo of mouth-wateringly intense sauces: a hot chilli and a barbecue sauce, each with a Somalian twist. Perfect with 'anjero' (Somalian pancakes) and spicy rice dishes - they're 100% vegan, too.

### How did your chilli sauce company start?

"I love home-cooking and even considered opening a Somalia-inspired restaurant but due to having young children, it just never worked. Instead, I started making my own unique chilli sauces at home, even going to Addis Ababa to hand-select the finest spices. I love experimenting with evocative flavours like tamarind, cinnamon and cloves, with a spicy after-kick courtesy of jalapeños and red chillies.

"I sold well at places like St Nicolas' Market in Bristol and soon scaled-up my output. I found a manufacturer, explained what I needed and gave them my recipe. They promised to recreate my authentic spicy flavours but it just didn't work. They lacked the explosive punch and sweet memorable tang of the real thing. A short while later, following great feedback from a Facebook food producers' group, I went with a second manufacturer. The same thing happened again! I didn't stop trying though.

"I had a third unpleasant surprise when trying to sell on Amazon. My sauces were popular and I was pleased, yet Amazon's sales charges and commissions meant I was making no profit at the end of each month despite good sales. It was all very complicated and I just didn't know enough about it. Something had to change.

"I started looking for local support and business advice. I didn't find what I was looking for with a local business enterprise organisation called Outset West of England, though I got great advice from the Black South West Network.



## Meeting the experts

“I then had a newcomer’s stand at the Source trade show in Exeter, where I was invited by a Morrison’s buyer to submit my product to be stocked in 300 stores. Unfortunately, I had difficulties completing their forms and, due to my per-unit costings, things didn’t stack up so I lost out.



**“At the same show, I also met Zoe Plant, the New Product Development and Food Innovation manager at FoodWorks<sup>SW</sup>. We really hit it off. She knew I had a quality product plus lots of passion, and could see where I needed guidance. Along with someone from the Black South West Network, I then visited FoodWorks<sup>SW</sup> and became a Business Member, giving me access to the team’s vast industry knowledge.**

“I don’t rent space or make any batch runs at FoodWorks<sup>SW</sup>’s impressive trial kitchens, but their support has been equally valuable. Between us we have identified a new manufacturer for my sauces. Zoe liaises between us and them, using terms they’re used to, to ensure I get what I need. She’s also introduced more stages into the production process, so that I taste-test the goods and they only proceed to full production on my say so. I’m back in control and am really happy with how things are progressing.

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“I’d advise people to go straight to FoodWorks<sup>SW</sup>. Skip the generic business advice networks and go straight to the food industry experts. Secondly, treat ‘failures’ as lessons. I got burned by unsatisfactory manufacturers and by Amazon’s charges, but now know more about costs and commissions. With FoodWorks<sup>SW</sup>’s support, these won’t be issues I’ll ever have to face again. Running a business of this nature can feel very lonely and no-one can be good at every aspect of it. Thanks to Zoe and the team, I feel part of something bigger”



## What next?

“I’m reassured by the team’s support as Elephant Chilli Sauces ramps up production and promotion in 2022. I’ve just signed an NDA with my new manufacturer and may yet return to knock on a certain supermarket retailer’s door a second time. I’m confident that my delicious products are now attractive to supermarket buyers (and to family shoppers like you and I) as well as being profitable to me.

“While visiting Kenya recently, my family made a deep connection with a local elephant and wildlife sanctuary. I’ll be donating 10% of my profits to them in 2022. This actually has nothing to do with the name Elephant Chilli Sauces but it’s certainly a useful coincidence!”

<https://www.elephantchillisauces.co.uk/>

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