

DODO TAKES FLIGHT

The flamboyant and unique Dodo-Pad diary brand has moved to Cornwall. Owner, Rebecca Jay, has successfully masterminded a revival of the infamous Lord Dodo and his organisational diaries.

Overview

Rebecca Jay was working as joint CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi in Prague in the mid 1990s when the world's largest advertising agency announced that it was to split in two. Almost simultaneously Rebecca found out that she was pregnant. "I saw it as an opportunity to change direction," she says. Rebecca began to make the transition from glamorous executive to North London mum, but when her son was just three weeks old, Rebecca got a phone call that set her life on an unexpected new course.

"It was an old friend, and she told me about a diary brand that was about to become extinct, called – aptly enough – the Dodo Pad. I'd been given one myself as a teenager and had fond memories of it. So, out of curiosity as much as anything, I agreed to give the company some marketing advice. I ended up buying the brand myself!"

By that stage, Dodo Pad was a trademark on its last legs. "My attitude was that this could be a useful way of keeping my brain-cells going while looking after a young baby," Rebecca remembers.

Workforce

Apart from Rebecca, Dodo Pad has four part-time staff, and has ongoing plans for expansion. "I've always run the company on the basis of flexible working," she explains. "Not least because I need to be able to work that way myself. It's great to be able to take the afternoon off and go and see my son playing rugby, but by the same token that might mean that I need to take my laptop home and deal with emails in the evening. Our finance manager comes in one day a week and invoices us for accountancy and book-keeping. The person who runs our mail order side had a top job in London, but like me, she's someone who wanted the flexibility that makes life that much more enjoyable."

Dodo Pad has moved its total stockholding to Cornwall and all of its products are now dispatched from Penzance. "Our new mail order firm is just so efficient and having them nearby has worked out brilliantly!" said Rebecca.

Dodo Pad outsources a lot of design and IT work to local suppliers. "The quality of the work you can get done in Cornwall is every bit as good as anything you'd find in London," she enthuses.



"I couldn't have imagined in my wildest dreams that I'd end up running a company that's turning over £300,000 a year!"

Dodo Pad now sells not just the original diaries but a whole range of quirkily branded merchandise, from personal organisers to greetings cards and mugs. Its products are on sale in bookshops and stationery suppliers throughout the UK, and the company is currently planning a major push into the US. All this from a quiet corner of west Cornwall.

"Trevor, my husband, had spent a lot of time here when he was younger and always hoped to move back," Rebecca explains. Then we arranged to rent a cottage in Mithian for a holiday, but got a letter from the agents to say that the owners were selling it, so we couldn't go. Trevor said 'I wonder how much they want for it,' and – to cut a long story short – we ended up living here."

Technology

For three years Dodo Pad kept an office and a sales manager in London, but Rebecca realised that with internet technology the whole business could just as easily be based in Cornwall. It's now housed in a converted stable block just three minutes drive from her home (or 15 minutes bike ride down the quiet country lanes). "We've got superb views over the countryside one way and down to the sea the other – the nicest workspace you could imagine," she says.

Broadband has made the move that much easier, says Rebecca. "We use Skype (a VoIP service), which means colleagues and I can talk to each other and our business partners – printers in China, designers in Ireland – whether we're in the office, at home or travelling away. You can even add a webcam that turns your laptop into a videophone."

Dodo Pad has completely revamped its website, and the business has already seen an increase in sales. Rebecca says "We secured funding for our website after winning Cornwall Film Fund's digital marketing award. This has been great for the business." So much so a top buyer recently commented that the website was "brilliant retail theatre... This has to be the most entertaining way to shop ever"