# SPOONBILL. SCOPING STUDY FOR A START-UP

# Introduction

This report is written for *Spoonbill,* a start-up business.

Its purpose is to:

* Outline some examples of customers engaging with likely products
* Discuss products to be developed
* Suggest a business process for maximising knowledge as the business develops.

# Findings from Insite Mapping®

Insite Mapping® was used in a discussion with the two founders, Aileen and Kerry. Because the business is in concept and planning stage, imaginative use was made of the technique to describe experiences with products that each person found attractive and that suggested ideas relating to their own business. Further imaginative work was done to delineate a group of products and relate them to customers with different needs and interests.

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| While waiting for a bus, Kerry looks at products that might be suitable gifts to take for a friend. A beautiful bottle stands out and she looks at it in more detail. |
| Aileen spends hours searching online for unusual spices for making sweets. Mentioning this at a dinner party someone suggests Murray River Pink Salt and Aileen researches it. If in a nice bottle and actually pink, it would contribute to a great gift. |
| Aileen cooks three different batches of sweets as an experiment with flavours and colours of ingredients. The colours looked good in the making but couldn’t be seen in the cooked sweets. Kerry was disappointed in the flavor as well (‘they tasted like dust’), though Aileen thought they were more successful. |
| At a local ‘Juice Plus’, Aileen discusses the business plans with a friend who is surprised and inspired with the ideas. Aileen decides to follow up with him soon. |
| In a mall while overseas, Kerry looks to see what others are making that she really likes. She purchases a beautiful round, deep blue, decorated tin that contains small squares of sweets that spiral out from the centre. The sweets are in different colours, flavours and textures. They are ‘little morsels of heaven’. Aileen is inspired by the packaging of the sweets. It gives her ideas for how to develop her own range. |
| At a local café, after yoga, Aileen offers samples to a group of friends, to get honest feedback about them. She has cooked two different kinds and they like them. |

# The purpose of the business and its products

Discussion about a few of the examples collected recently by Kerry helped to decide on the business purpose. The founders want to provide high quality sweets and other treats with appropriate design and packaging (see below) that enhances the Australian origin.

These kinds of products are a twin package and a double treat. Not just a lovely package but a delicious treat that comes with the story of its origin and is presented beautifully in packaging that can be re-used. It is ‘a gift that keeps on giving’. Another way of expressing this work of *Spoonbill* products is to ‘enhance the gifting relationship’.

The design for each product will be developed to express its origin. It is not something just for the shelf or cupboard but for exchange, display and memories. It will be very high quality and will aspire to become an iconic brand; ‘How can we make our own version of, ‘Spoonbill delight’ ?

**Design and packaging**

The original intentions were to make gifts of sweets that were packaged in attractive ways that showed their origins. The gifts should also have a character of luxury and quality.

**Elements of products**

The sweets should look good and be enjoyable eating as well as satisfying and wholesome. They should not be over-sugared.

**Price**

The price is likely to be at the higher end of the sweets gift market because of its quality and the attractive packaging.

# Product research and taste testing

**Range of ingredients**

The range of ingredients discussed during the workshop was broad.

**Research was conducted by Kerry and Aileen** through talking with friends, cooking and asking friends for honest feedback. They looked at how food with flavours they were interested in using, were positioned in local shops. Much of the packaging was not very attractive.

We ‘analysed’ some ginger chocolates sold as a premium product and saw a discrepancy in the description of its quality and location, then its manufacture and ingredients sourced in China. In another example, sweets bought in New Zealand provided a connection with the place. Otherwise, outlets for sweets seem ‘tacky’ and show a general lack of care, for example some dried up fudge in New Zealand and a local lolly shop. An English friend had packaged fudge simply but beautifully for local markets and the combination of wrapping and good-looking fudge had ‘sealed the deal’.

# Issues for the business

**Creating the products**

This workshop technique usually talks about and reveals customers but the energy and purpose this time was about products and the steps in beginning a business that involves the development of

products that do not exist yet, for markets where they are not available. It is about *creating* the markets for quality, beautifully designed sweets. Kerry and Aileen were asked to imagine specific customers and the products they would be interested in and had no trouble doing so. Indeed it inspired talk of a range of products, with design and packaging made to appeal to and satisfy that particular kind of customer. The design and marketing challenge would be to develop, present and position each unique product but create some intrinsic and visual connection between them.

**‘Jump in’**

On reflection, matching customers to products is not the crucial point at this stage in the business. What seems more important is to begin; ‘Jump in and give it a shot’. This requires thinking through the process of creating the business and the products in ways that provide vital knowledge.

**Maximise your learning and knowledge as you go with a ‘recursive’ business development process**

The process can be thought of as a ‘recursive’ one, where you keep coming back to the purpose and focus of the business as you develop each product, test its acceptability and interest with a particular kind of customer, cost and manufacture it and improve its packaging. This is also the ‘agile’ approach that people like to talk about in regard to IT innovations.

So, I suggest:

* Start with two sweets products that use ingredients that are available, interesting, transportable, in packaging that is sealable. Products that you can make at home but would also be possible to make and package by others in a commercial kitchen. This is the mundane practical part of your decisions.
* The two products should also be a bit different to each other so each has customers/ a story/ appearance that could be purchased separately or together but even so they would be distinctive (you’d like people to buy both, but for different reasons).
* Research all the regulations in relation to these two products about selling each of them and manufacturing them. Get the initial supply sorted and look at the prospective supply.
* Do your product development and taste testing in parallel with the regulation research.
* For each product, when you are clear about the ingredients, recipe and main customers who like and engage with it, design and make the packaging.
* Sell or give away some in a retail location or market where people buy quality food, and get feedback.
* If you have enough product, a farmer’s market might be a good place or you could piggy-back on
* someone else’s store where they sell related but not the same things. Do this for each product, not necessarily together. You are wanting to pick up the differences as well as what works for both.
* For each product, go through the cycle a few times until you have the sequence clear to yourselves and you know the cost and can sustain the supply.
* Talk to people who are doing similar things and are sustaining their business, for example the

‘Nutty Sisters’, a few of the food retailers at farmer’s markets etc. The advantage of having two products in tandem is that one may fail or be received for different reasons and you will learn much more as you go. You can change the product itself, the packaging, the placement and other things gradually as you learn and the things that don’t work won’t be too costly.

During this time you will also be honing the ‘back end’ of the business and your respective roles in the business partnership. You should also start at some point to get cash flow so it is all very real and, hopefully, encouraging. If one product fails you could start a different ‘second’ one. Remember the cycle and revisit it as a systematic way of thinking, to keep improving your products and business.

Use this approach and the changes you make to it from experience, to begin each new product and develop, test and package it.

If the business becomes successful very quickly you will have a bit more money to expand and enough knowledge to take the next steps in products, retail outlets etc. You will also be developing a network of people with skills and advice you can rely on.

Good fortune to *Spoonbill*!

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