



OXFORD SOAP COMPANY

a local, family-run business that designs and creates handmade, environmentally friendly soaps and cosmetics in Oxfordshire.

The Oxford Soap Company, based in Oxford's iconic The Covered Market, are best known for their popular zero waste items, soap and shampoo bars, as well as a wide range of minimised plastic packaged products such as shaving soap, moisturising lotion, hand and face cream, bath salts and beard oil. They also offer private workshops where customers can create their own, bespoke products using a variety of chosen ingredients.

Founder Ervin Tomkys Valteri, tells us how the business began "It all started as a hobby. Going back to 2008, I was frustrated with the mass production of products as well as the lack of environmentally friendly products. I began to explore making my own soaps and creams. Following positive feedback, I realised this could be a really good business. So, I started to sell my products via a small website. I also sold them locally at market fairs and during the summer months on Oxford's High Street from a converted ice cream bike. From here it grew from strength to strength and with the support from my wife Emily, I was able to open a shop in The Covered Market in 2018. It was the right place at the right time, but it was still a big leap for us, a huge risk financially. But luckily it paid off."

Cleaning up the environment

The Oxford Soap Company are committed to producing natural and environmentally friendly recipes. Ervin elaborates on how they do this "Yes, the environment is very important to us. We make sure that none of our products are tested on animals and we also source our ingredients from local suppliers who also don't test on animals. All our products are vegan and the colour in them isn't artificial, it comes from natural mineral micas. Plus, we only use RSPO certified palm oil in some of our soap recipes, and also offer a completely palm free soap range. Producing products that are good to the planet is something I always wanted in the business and I think it's helped our appeal to the market also."

Help OxLEP!! Too much soap and too little time

Demand for The Oxford Soap company's products was rapidly increasing. Ervin explains "I think Covid propelled soap coming back into fashion, suddenly everyone was using it again. We were getting lots of interest from consumers, but also from businesses who wanted to buy our products in bulk and sell them on. It was a natural progression. We were getting a lot of attention in that direction. But this required us to produce products on a much larger scale.



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I found that I simply didn't have enough time to make enough products to meet this demand. Plus, with young children at home it was difficult for me to find time to do everything. Financially, we didn't have enough capital to purchase better equipment or employ anyone. I just wasn't prepared for scaling up. I knew we needed help.”

Ervin continues “As part of a small independent business group I was signposted to OxLEP during Covid. I did some digging and found that there was support for SME's who were struggling during this time, so we applied and were awarded a Kick Start grant which helped us focus on digital marketing for our online sales while the shop was closed. And more recently we were awarded a larger grant through OxLEP's Business Investment Fund. This has helped us take the business to the next level.

OxLEP's grant funding revolutionises The Oxford Soap Company's production line

Ervin expresses how crucial OxLEP's Business Investment Fund grant was for them in their scaling up plans “This grant has been amazing for us, it's helped us purchase our scaling-up production equipment. I previously used just kitchen equipment, but now I have four 150 litres melting pots which I can use to produce all of our products. One example of how revolutionary this has been for us is, where I used to produce 250 bars of soap in one day, I can now produce 1700 bars in the same amount of time. And, if things really kick off and I employ one more person to help with production, this amount could be tripled ... quadrupled even. It's set us up for the next 5 years, at least. The funding also allowed



us to employ someone full time in the shop who looks after selling. This means I have more time to focus on the production and workshops, and do more networking where I can speak to businesses and focus on our business growth.”

A squeaky clean future

Ervin and Emily are extremely excited about the future for the business. Emily tells us “We now have a few hotels and local businesses buying for corporate gifts as well as new wholesale opportunities, such as The Ashmolean Museum who are stocking our products. This is what we are going to focus on more in the future – working with larger corporate businesses. With OxLEP's help this is now achievable for us.

Our future is looking really positive and we are very excited about the next phase. The OxLEP team have played a key role in our growth. They have been so helpful with everything. They are really quick at responding which has been wonderful. And they also thankfully spotted a calculation error I made during the application, so things like that have been invaluable. We absolutely recommend OxLEP to other businesses.”



FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:
oxfordsoapcompany.co.uk

If you are looking for support for your business get in touch with us to find out how our team of specialists at OxLEP Business can help you.

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