

Mentoring partnership stories

It started out serendipitously. Two first-time mums and their infants who faced an everyday challenge, but without a suitable solution.

The problem?

Fiddly poppers on baby clothes.

The objective?

High-quality and environmentally friendly and functional changing solutions to bring happier times to families, worldwide.

Enter: Sleep Thief.



Sleep Thief creates fun, functional, faff-free children's clothing, all with the aim of making the lives of parents, carers and children easier. The company was founded by mum-friends Effie Dower and Sophie Swallow who recognised the need for innovation in baby clothing. Both Effie and Sophie were constantly annoyed by poppers and heard the same complaints from parents everywhere they went. Sleep Thief was launched with the aim to create parent-approved, popper-free baby clothing.

The business took shape after Sophie was lamenting at length about how irritating and fiddly poppers were, particularly at night. She says,

“There was this tiny person who had just fallen asleep, the room was pitch black and there I was trying to pop them together through the haze of sleep deprivation”

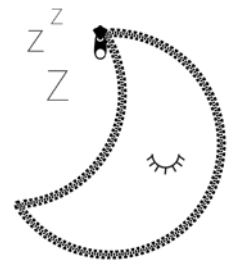
Whilst zip-up options were available, they were manufactured and shipped on the other side of the world. The import taxes and carbon footprint meant these weren't a suitable option.

Effie: We're not creating for innovation's sake. Whilst the baby-market is saturated, there is a scarcity of eco-conscious brands whose aim is to make the lives of parents easier. Everything we create is made in England, keeping our supply chain as short as possible.

Effie and Sophie were matched to mentor Clare-Marie, owner of ThinkSMART Marketing.

With more than 20 years' experience of marketing large consumer business, including Head of Retail Marketing at Mamas and Papas, Clare-Marie's joined the Santander Breakthrough programme with the intention of supporting other local businesses with her mentoring know-how. She's also a member of the Association of Business Mentors.

Effie and Sophie wanted to make Sleep Thief more streamlined and self-sufficient, with the necessary sales funnels in place to continue the growth trajectory of the brand. Covid-19 brought everything into sharp reality.



sleep thief

Effie: We upgraded the website and because of that we've seen more people sign up and in turn, our sales have increased as well. We've implemented a trading calendar and created nurture sequences – all these things we didn't know about when we established the brand.

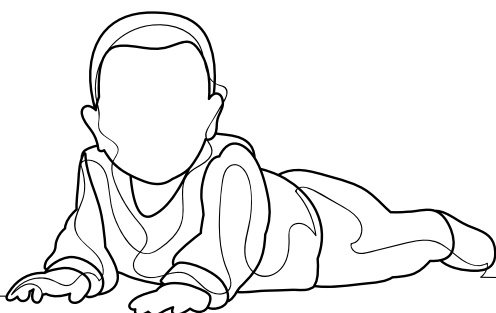
“ **As self-taught CEOs, the mentoring programme and working with Clare-Marie has been in valuable.** ”

Effie

“ We realised we were firefighting without having a long-term structure in place. Whilst we initially applied for the mentoring programme for marketing support, working with Clare-Marie has allowed us to take a step back, think ahead and strategise. By having Clare-Marie on our side and sharing her wisdom, it's given us the confidence and courage to step away from the everyday and to remap our business. ”

Effie

Clare-Marie: It was the reason I chose to become a marketing consultant. Planning, structure and process mapping was something I was doing everyday already, but I wanted to grow that. I knew what the pain points were and how to help. Mentoring gives the most reward when you're working with a start-up, you can be there to look objectively at their business model, and support by working as a partnership. In online retail, 80% of the processes need to be automated, meaning the final 20% is for thinking on your feet. Effie and Sophie have a great brand, but it was about giving them the structure, planning tools and processes to grow.



What has been the impact of Covid-19? Has your business model changed?

Sophie: It was a double-edged sword. Our older children were in nursery, so were suddenly at home all day. Plus, we both have new-borns as well. Without friends around to play with, the older children wanted and needed constant interaction. However, where everything was slowing down, it meant we were naturally forced to do the same – and for the business, it came at the perfect time.

Clare-Marie: Initially, Covid-19 meant businesses went into panic mode. But customers' needs have now changed – they've pivoted, but not paused. I encouraged Effie and Sophie to keep listening to their customers and build those insights into their marketing plan.



Considering the unknown territory we have all faced these past few months, has there been any stand out moments for you and your business when you have gone beyond the fear and built courage to tackle these issues, particularly when you have not been able to predict or control the outcome?

Effie: Clare-Marie has encouraged us to step out of our comfort zone and use social media to build our own public profile, away from our brand.

Clare-Marie: People regularly speak of the imposter syndrome, particularly when it comes to posting on business social media. They assume that what they're offering isn't 'good enough' compared to someone else. It was a case of encouraging Effie and Sophie to see the value of what they're creating and to build that up consistently.

Sophie: We both came to the programme with an open mind, but Clare-Marie has really given us everything we had hoped and more.

Effie: I completely agree. We started the programme in February, not really knowing what was going to happen. Clare-Marie has helped immeasurably, from her time to the connections she's shared. Despite being so busy herself, she's always been there for us and able to help.

Clare-Marie: It has been a rewarding process mentoring both Effie and Sophie. They have been fully motivated throughout, taking on board new ideas and running with them. They have an exciting future ahead of them with Sleep Thief and I'm loving being part of their journey.

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[READ MORE ABOUT THE MENTORING PROGRAMME ▶](#)