

Small business in the spotlight ... Savse smoothies

Using family recipes, the healthy drinks business with Georgian roots has expanded into stores including Boots and Whole Foods



📷 Guka Tavberidze and his mum Nina Tavberidze. Photograph: Savse Smoothies

Where did the idea for Savse come from?

The idea started out 30 years ago in Georgia when my mum, Nina, was pregnant. The doctors found she was suffering from an iron deficiency and that she should try to eat spinach and apples to increase her iron levels. So she bought a blender, and started experimenting with fruit and veg. She made them for me and my sisters, Sophia and Salli, and we always enjoyed them without really knowing what was in them.

After dropping out of university, I moved from job to job, but nothing really excited me. That's when I started looking at the smoothies on the market. I was often working six or seven days a week and wanted a healthy drink - like the ones my mother made - to perk me up. Using my mum's recipes, and with investment from my uncle, I launched the business in 2013. I chose the name Savse because it means "crammed full" in Georgian, and the smoothies are crammed with goodness.

There are lots of smoothies on the market - what's Savse's USP?

A lot of smoothie-type drinks use heat pasteurisation to make the product last longer and kill bacteria. The ingredients are boiled at 78 degrees, which strips out the goodness. Savse smoothies are different as they're cold pressed.

We use a method called high pressure processing (HPP) to make our smoothies. The fruit and veg ingredients are packaged in plastic containers and put in a high-pressure chamber filled with water. When the chamber is switched on it reaches pressures of 87,000 psi. Everything is completely fresh and the process gets rid of bacteria and gives the product a longer shelf life. There weren't any factories offering HPP in the UK, but I found one in Holland, which we still use.

Did you face any challenges when first starting out?

When I'd found a factory, I came back to London and spoke to Waitrose and Sainsbury's about stocking Savse, but they didn't go for the product right away. They suggested I make the move to start selling myself. They said if I could show there was demand for the brand, they'd take it.

I was quite disappointed, but I sort of did what they suggested and tried to make the brand exclusive. But it was tough getting in touch with buyers. I couldn't get them to answer the phone, so I had to call around on a daily basis - you have to be really motivated to keep that up.

Have you had any breakthrough moments?



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I found the Selfridges buyer on LinkedIn. I persisted with her, and took a smoothie to her office for her to try. It worked; Selfridges was the first place our products were stocked.

Once we were on the shelves of Selfridges, other companies followed. Six months after that, a Boots buyer saw us in a Planet Organic store and got in contact. We wanted to make the product premium from the beginning so it is priced slightly differently depending on where it's sold. As well as Boots, Savse is now stocked in Virgin Active gyms, Harrods, Whole Foods, Waitrose and Ocado.

In February we negotiated to get the product into more Boots stores.

What's the working culture like at Savse?

There's only six of us in our team and we've all been friends since school. Patrick [Constantis] is the head of our logistics and supply chain - I've known him since he was 11. It's tricky, because we're best friends and I'm his boss, but we make it work. My good friend Lana [Haxa] is our sales on accounts manager and my sister Sophia also works with us. We're all extremely close. And my mum is like a mother to us all. That's not something I've experienced in the workplace before.

What are your plans for the future of the business?

We're not about fad diets, but all about balance. Madeleine Shaw [a celebrity nutritionist] has recently become our brand ambassador, so that's part of our growing marketing strategy. And we're looking towards international expansion. We've already started to take the first steps in our expansion outside the UK.

What advice would you give to budding entrepreneurs?

Keep going no matter what - until you find a way that works. I always had the belief and faith to take my business forward. You have to have passion and drive and love for your brand to be a success.

Guka Tavberidze is the founder and chief executive of [Savse smoothies](#)

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