

Business daily

Edited
by Paul
Robins



Friday business profile

After years of suffering with food allergies Lorraine Vaughan decided to set up her own website to help others with food intolerances rustle up great meals. She told **PAUL ROBINS** how her whole family have become Allergy Cooks

The business: Allergy Cooks, Erleigh Court Drive, Earley, 07973 386692, www.allergycooks.co.uk

The boss: Managing director Lorraine Vaughan.

What is your business about?

"Www.allergycooks is a subscription website that helps people with multiple food intolerances to cook great food. We provide recipes and information via our website and a discussion forum.

"All our recipes are totally free from wheat, egg and dairy products. We also give guidance on how they can be modified to remove other allergens such as soya and yeast.

"The general principle is that you should be able to cook one meal that everyone can eat instead of having to prepare something "special" for the person with intolerances.

"We recognise that not everyone will want to bake their own dishes, so our testing panel is munching its way through every shop-bought 'free-from' product we can find and our opinions are posted on the discussion forum."

How did you start the business? "I set up the business from my home in September 2006 and spent several months carrying out research and developing my own recipes. The website was finally launched in May this year."

Where did the idea come from? "I have suffered for years

with digestive problems but it was in spring last year when I found a blood-testing service that could pinpoint the causes.

"Having identified that I was sensitive to wheat, wheat gluten, barley, oats, corn, buckwheat, eggs, milk, brazil nuts and almonds, I cut them all out of my diet to see what would happen.

"I searched the shops for suitable products that I could eat but there was little available.

"Then I tried to do my own cooking but I couldn't find a suitable recipe book either.

"I started writing my own recipes and soon had enough to write my own book.

"My daughter suggested that I should set up the service since other people would be experiencing the same difficulties."

Do you have any employees?

"No, but my husband tests all my recipes to make sure that they work properly. The whole family is roped in to taste the results from our own recipes and to test the 'free-from' products that we put on trial."

Who are your clients? "Mostly individuals who are cooking for somebody with specific food intolerances. We also have some vegan members since our recipes cut out eggs and dairy products."

What has the feedback been like so far? "Very good. Although we only launched last month, we have already received over 50 emails from people

commenting on the recipes."

Do you think enough is done to help people with food allergies? "No, there's a great deal we still don't understand about how the body works and many doctors are still concentrating on the symptoms of allergies rather than the causes.

"After changing my own family's diet because of my intolerances, my digestive problems are much improved.

"I have far fewer migraines but also my son's hay fever, asthma and acne have completely disappeared.

"Eating out is also a huge problem. Hotels, restaurants and cafes are often unsympathetic to our needs and many don't have a clue what is in their dishes."

Are your recipes complicated to make?

"The recipes are so easy to make even my husband can follow them. Most can be prepared and cooked within half an hour."

What's the best thing about being the boss?

"Seeing the business developing and knowing that it is as a result of my own efforts, and also being able to make my own decisions without having to go through all the 'red tape' that you have to negotiate in a large company."

What are your plans for the future?

"There are currently 30 new recipes in the pipeline which will be published on the site in the next few weeks.

"I am also working on some new features including lots more links and monthly competitions which will be run in association with 'free-from' food producers.

"I am also aiming to get my recipe book published and in the shops early next year."



RECIPE MAKER – Lorraine Vaughan runs Allergy Cooks which provides tasty recipes for people with food intolerances
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