

# Spin the chocolate wheel

By Jessica Pedemont  
Chocolate Artisan

Running a small business is not all couverture and gold leaf. At times it's spread sheets and BAS reports. One moment you might be in the kitchen working on an amazing project and then all of a sudden you're in web design meetings and explaining to your accountant financial future expenditures. What happened to baking cakes and blending ganache?

Sometimes I feel I am spinning inside a chocolate wheel. Some say it's a piece of cake, but I feel like I got the whole cherry pie. Bridging the gap from working for someone else to working for yourself in this trade has seen many stories of triumph and treachery. By sharing a little bit about my industry experiences I hope I can help or, better yet, inspire you to take that leap to do business on your own.

We all love a good thing, especially good food. It's a sensory world out there. Take 'pain aux chocolats' for example: it's a viennoiserie classic, a pastry staple. Break it apart and see the flaky pastry, smell the cocoa, feel the butter, hear the crunch and taste the chocolate. Yep, we haven't even thrown in a particular brand or business, yet we know it's good. Bakeries have queues around the world lining up for them. In a roundabout way, this is what I love about my industry. No matter how much you're willing to put in, there is more than you could ever eat! You will never know it all – the Holy Grail will never run out. Travel the world, there's plenty of cuisine and cultures to explore. Many are out for the next challenge to the next dinner reservation. I'm into those things too.

Having reached a well-established point owning my own company of foodie goodness, a company known for signature Christmas fruitcake and masterclasses, one thing has remained the same – it's an incredibly rewarding experience. From a work experience school kid at 15 to an apprentice in the Rockpool group, going on culinary sabbaticals and taking up sous chef positions, I began to see my executive pastry chef role morph into that of a budding chocolatier. I found entering competitions was another great way to develop my resume. When you start to add more competitions and awards to the collection, complete globally recognised certificates and short courses, it all starts to build up and grow your confidence.

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Coming up very soon is one of my favourite events, The Sydney Royal Cheese & Dairy produce show 2012, which my chocolate has been lucky enough to be awarded medals for in the past. Run by the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW, the annual competition provides producers with the opportunity to benchmark themselves within the industry. Think you might be interested? Talk about needing to be prepared, you have to get your paperwork in by end of October the previous year! Yes, the time when most of us are thinking about Christmas orders, catering for end-of-year celebrations and, for some of us, thousands of fruit mince tarts and gingerbread houses. You need to spend time in the office making phone calls, going online, sending a few emails and faxing off your entry form. I've entered and look forward to seeing the results and hopefully lucky enough to win some more medals.

No matter what you do, you want to maximise your time wisely, because you can easily run out of it. You need to make some serious decisions about what your prepared to invest in to your crazy culinary ventures. It could be seasonal, a product, restaurant, shop, a sideline or so on. Do you live, breath, eat it? You own your work, you're a brand at the end of the day, from the time you awake up to even when you're sleeping. Think about what to do and make yearly goals. Break out the calendar, start jotting down ideas. Make investments from educational to equipment. Some of mine for 2012 include going to San Francisco to take classes at the world-renowned baking institute (SFBI), and visit the Culinary Institute of America. When I get back I intend to complete my Certificate 4, which will enable me to formally teach at such establishments as TAFE NSW, where I taught masterclasses last year as apart of being one of the 120-year ambassadors for education.

Still spinning that chocolate wheel bigger than ever, I found I needed to extend the team, particularly in areas of the great 'unknown'



for me, whether that's hiring an account, web designer, graphics designer, courier services or IT experts. I am happy to pay for clientele that provide a service just like I do. Weigh up your value, perform a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) and look at what is financially viable.

In order to look forward I feel it's vital to look back and reflect on some of the milestones along the way. One these 'melting moments' was when I was asked to be the ambassador for 100-year-old Swiss chocolate company Felchlin in 2010. To share my passion with these people is one of my inspirations, feeding my growth and development. I have never found two of my weeks ever to be the same, so remember to love what you do and do what you love. Until next time, keep spinning that wheel. ■