

Bedazzle My Bonbons

Sparkling Sweet Surprises with Business Sense

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Sasha Vincent has always had a flair for the flamboyant, and Bedazzle My Bonbons (BMB) proves that even chocolates can benefit from a little sparkle. At age 16 Sasha was almost suspended from high school for wearing her trademark glitter lipstick, which the school's administration considered too distracting.

Unphased by both her peers and the administration, Sasha continued to mix up her own sparkling lip treatment, which she now considers her brand signature. Ultimately, Sasha's individual brand of eccentricity, strong personal commitment, and passion for all things sparkly led her to develop a bedazzling coating that packs a lot of sparkle without a detectable taste or texture.

BMB specializes in creating customized bedazzling chocolate bonbons, sparkling hard candy lollipops and accessories to creatively display all the twinkling treats. The product line is available in 24 fabulous colors and six decadent flavors. The colors can even be customized to match any swatch of fabric, table linen or logo.

"My dad likes to tease me because I work so hard, but the truth is that I need to be involved with the company," says Sasha, founder and still CEO of BMB. "It doesn't matter how big we grow, I'm

still going to be the one who answers the phones and actually deals with the clients." Currently, BMB's four hardworking production employees fill wholesale orders from headquarters in Tampa, Fla., and ship to customers across the globe.



Coming Full Circle

Prior to founding BMB Sasha spent 20 years in the nightclub industry and led the charge in bringing back the vintage glamor of cigar girls in Atlanta's nightclubs. By 2006, however, cigars were being banned from venues around the city and Sasha saw the opportunity to make a major change. After Sasha sold her cigar business, the plan was to take two years off and travel the globe, but Sasha's entrepreneurial instincts proved to be too loud to ignore.

"After just two months I began brainstorming ways to capitalize on the appeal of this glitter lipstick without getting into cosmetics and selling my signature lipstick," recalls

Sasha. "I wanted people to be able to enjoy the appeal of my glitter lipstick, without actually being able to buy lots of it and copy my unique signature trademark."

Instead, Sasha contacted a food scientist online, and together they developed a similar version perfect for a variety of applications.



BMB's bedazzling coating uses a starch-based product combined with sanding sugars and food coloring for its signature sheen. More so than the ingredients, it is the application process that gives the bonbons the bedazzled effect without any noticeable change in taste or texture to the chocolate.

Originally, Sasha's plan was to open a small retail shop and test the market, but after six months and one trade show appearance, she switched gears entirely, closed the retail shop, and now focuses solely on the wholesale and event-planning market.

"The event industry went wild over the product; they were desperate for something new and unique, and it immediately became a frenzy in the event and catering industry," beams Sasha. "Even after six years of trade shows, 90 percent of the trade-show attendees have not heard or seen anything like it."

BMB can custom match any color scheme or fabric swatch, pack bonbons as party favors, and can even arrange for a team of glamorous bonbon babes to serve the treats up cigar-box style.

Sasha realized early on that shipping would present a considerable challenge for the Florida-based business. In the event-planning industry reliability is everything. Ultimately, Sasha's search led her to find a custom-designed shipping cooler that is lined with an inch-and-a-half thick silver mylar insulation, and provides an advantageous alternative to the traditional Styrofoam coolers previously found in the industry.

With the new packaging BMB can ship to any location in the world at any time of the year, with no risk of spoilage. BMB even once shipped to a client in the Pacific just off the coast of Japan. "The bonbons were purchased by a Japanese naval base, and due to the high security at the receiving location the package was held up in customs for nine days, but all 1,400

chocolates arrived in pristine condition," boasts Sasha.

Sweet Surprises

After six years BMB has served up its sparkling treats at events for companies like Neiman Marcus and Disney; this success is due to the team's ability to adapt and hit the ground running. In fact, many of the company's non-chocolate offerings are the result of customer requests. When the Disney Channel approached Sasha about applying the bedazzling coating to more than chocolate bonbons, Sasha responded and launched BMB's Dazzle Pops. The hard candy lollipops are coated in BMB's signature glitz and were featured, along with the bonbons, in the Hannah Montana movie. Sasha added the dazzle pops to the permanent selection of BMB products to suit clients who desire a bedazzling treat, but may prefer non-chocolate options because of taste or dietary restrictions.

In fact, what once appeared to be one of BMB's biggest hurdles became one of its greatest appeals. Early on the bedazzling coating's ability to make its way everywhere presented a logistical challenge to the BMB team, highlighted when an event planner approached BMB about ordering bonbons for a very high-profile political event. After experimenting with a number of products,



Sasha discovered a confectioner's glaze that successfully kept the bedazzled coating in place, but dulled the product and gave the bonbons a noticeable crunch.

BMB had no trouble adjusting the bonbon babe uniform to fit the conservative atmosphere of the highly publicized political event, but the spread of bedazzle everywhere still presented a problem for guests in full black tie attire. Ultimately, the confectioner's glaze compromised the aesthetics and texture of the final product too much and BMB opted to forgo the use of the confectionery glaze for the event.

"Long story short, the event planner told me afterward that the guests had a ball with the bonbons and that the bedazzle coming off on them was actually the whole fun of it," laughs Sasha.

Considering how delicious Sasha's treats are, it was somewhat surprisingly that some of BMB's clients were ordering the treats in bulk to be used as a decorative item only, which prompted Sasha to expand once again with peripheral items to meet client's new needs. Sasha witnessed the bonbons take on new life as decorations for wedding cakes, cocktails, cupcakes and even as décor within a centerpiece arrangement.

"I never imagined that I would be selling 50 percent of my product for decorating purposes, but we do," explains Sasha.

BMB now sells a bonbon pyramid display, manufactured in Lyon, France, that fills both a functional and decorative need for events while enhancing the bonbons at the same time. The pyramid is made from a high-gloss, black plastic resin that folds completely flat and then pops up into a three-dimensional pyramid to prominently display the bonbons on all sides.

In addition, BMB has custom matched a line of glittered cupcake sleeves for the growing cupcake market. Like the dazzle pops, the sleeves can be color-matched and shipped with the bonbons. This allows clients to fill the sleeve with a store-bought cupcake and top it with a bedazzled bonbon. The bonbons can be placed

either in a foil cup for placing on platters or plates, or without a foil cup for decorating cakes or cupcakes. The bonbons can also be placed on four-inch sticks for the arrangement of centerpieces.

"One of our regular clients from the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago offered what they appropriately named the 'Bonbon Garden,'" states Sasha. "The museum always asks us to send their bonbons on sticks, and then they insert them in a bed of wheatgrass so their guests can pick their favorite color." Many of these delectable treats and custom settings can be previewed at bedazzlemybonbons.com.

Stability for Today and Tomorrow

Six years after starting her company Sasha is still manning the phones, filling orders and checking deliveries, setting the example in her own business endeavor that she expects from everyone she does business with.

"Reliability is key in this industry," says Sasha. "It's why we ship on Monday, because if by Wednesday that package doesn't look like it's going to make it because of a UPS delay we still have enough time to ship a back-up order. We can deal with the shipping service later, but regardless of the size of the order, we make sure it arrives when it needs to be there. After all, a lot of the events are actually centered on the bonbons. Many clients say they start with the idea of the bonbons and then create an event that coordinates around the various colors they have chosen."

Even early on Sasha was not afraid of making the tough decisions to carry the business through even tougher economic times and some unavoidable growing pains. After two years of working with an inconsistent chocolate supplier, Sasha cut the cord and switched to McClain's Gourmet, based out of Sarasota, Fla., which has a similar corporate philosophy to hers.

"I remember one time we received an order of 3,000 chocolate balls that were slightly defective and McClain's owner got in his car the very next day to deliver a new pristine shipment," admits Sasha. "This is our philosophy and the key to why we are successful: clients know we will do whatever it takes to make sure their bonbons arrive on time and in pristine condition no matter what challenges we may face."

In a business where aesthetics reign supreme, reliability can never be compromised. Sasha and the BMB team stand firm in their commitment to exceeding the client's expectations. In the coming years Sasha will certainly still remain heavily involved in the business, and customers are likely to love BMB all the more for it. With a keen eye for customer's needs and a personal touch in every aspect, Bedazzle My Bonbons is equipped to grow steadily without ever losing Sasha Vincent's charm and integrity. •