



Alison Banton

Brooke and Shoals

GOING FOR GROWTH PROFILE

NAME:

Alison Banton

BUSINESS

Brooke and Shoals

POSITION

Founder/Owner

WHAT WE DO

Produces natural wax scented candles & organic body products (Retail & Wholesale)

CONTACT US

Church Road,
Greystones,
Co. Wicklow, Ireland

T: +353 (0)1 287 4199

E: admin@brookeandshoals.ie
www.brookeandshoals.ie



Before Alison Banton became an entrepreneur, she worked as a Marketing & Brand Manager in the Financial Services Sector. Having left college with a Masters Degree in Economics, she always knew she would eventually become her own boss, but felt that gaining some valuable experience in the corporate world would definitely stand to her in the long run. She enjoyed her job and worked her way up to senior management level but in 2007 she felt the time was right to exit the corporate world and become a full-time entrepreneur. *"I had gained great experience and I wanted the challenge of creating my own brand and marketing something I could be really passionate about"*

Alison opened *Brooke and Shoals*, a gift shop in Greystones, Co. Wicklow. The shop's stock range included scented candles from a variety of producers. Since childhood, Alison had a love for fragrance which stemmed from the aromas of the petals she picked in her great-aunt's rose garden. She began researching the idea of producing her own brand of scented candles to sell in the shop.

After completing a course in fragrance development in the *Grasse Institute of Perfumery* in the south of France, Alison began developing her own fragrances and a range of scented candles. *"A lot of time and effort has been put into our various fragrances. For our candles, we use only natural soy wax from a sustainable source. All our products are manufactured (hand-poured) in Ireland. They are eco-friendly and they smell really nice!"*

Alison began making and selling products in her own shop. Initially, she thought that she would achieve growth by opening other Brooke and Shoals retail outlets. Soon it became clear that this was not the best strategy. Instead Alison decided to grow as a Business to business supplier. Before long, the opportunity to grow arose. *"We started getting requests from other people to stock them, so in 2010 I decided to scale the business. I went into the wholesale market, producing more fragrances and candles so I could sell them to other retailers. I began attending trade shows to promote the products to potential stockists."* The Greystones shop is still thriving, however, and gives Alison direct access to customers to gauge their reaction to new products.

Accessing finance in order to grow the business proved quite challenging for Alison. *"We were in the middle of the recession and the banks weren't lending. In the end, Wicklow County Enterprise Board gave us financial support. This was a huge help as it allowed me to market the business, raise awareness of the brand, and design the packaging."*

The packaging of the Brooke and Shoals products are designed to be attractive and feminine, in order to fit well into the retail environment. Marketing what many consider a luxury brand during a recession was difficult. For Alison, it was important to ensure that the products were as appealing as possible, as many consumers weren't willing to spend as much as before. *"We saw a gap in the market for a premium scented candle that was high quality, design-led, natural, Irish made and better value than high-end European equivalents."*

Alison was a participant on the Pilot of Going for Growth and was invited to join the Continuing the Momentum roundtables in 2014. *"Going for Growth is a great opportunity to network with other like-minded women who have similar ambitions. Being a business woman can be a lonely road. Setting up and trying to focus strategically can be difficult at times - you tend to get dragged into the day to day running of the business. The programme keeps you disciplined and helps you focus on growth."*

Every year, Brooke and Shoals have added more and more customers to their list. They now have over 110 stockists around Ireland and have 7 staff employed. The company are also exporting to the UK, France and Germany. Alison plans to add to her customer base in Ireland, while also concentrating on increasing export sales in 2014. She is hopeful that her products are reaching all corners of the world. Specifically designed travel size candles have been available on all Aer Lingus flights since 2012. With so many Irish people living abroad, Alison believes her Irish made products have great potential in the export market.

Brooke and Shoals currently stock nine different fragrances, including 4 floral, 4 citrus fruit/woods and one Christmas fragrance. Fragrance diffusers have also been introduced. Alison is committed to expanding her product range. A body product range with a unisex blend of citrus and floral has also been created by Alison using only essential oils. *"I think it is important to bring new products to market regularly. It is an exciting time for us in Brooke and Shoals - we will be adding two more fragrances into both the candles and diffusers collections in April and May 2014."*

It has been ten years since Alison first became an entrepreneur. Despite the changes along the way, she has no regrets. Having achieved significant growth during the recession, Brooke and Shoals are now strongly positioned, as the Irish and global economies begin to pick up.



Investing in your future

