

# THE IRISH TIMES

## Inside Track Q&A Petalwell

### Aromatherapy device has sweet smell of success

#### Ruth O'Connor

Two sisters were inspired by the family business in their focus on high quality

The **Petalwell** is a portable, rechargeable device which uses heat technology to disperse natural essential oils for use in a therapeutic setting or for personal use.

**Petalwell** is owned by sisters Jacqueline Oglesby and Rachel Purcell and the device is made at Oglesby & Butler in Co Carlow, which supplies globally renowned tool companies with high-quality tools and devices primarily for use in agriculture.

**What's sets your business apart from the competition?** Many of the other diffusers on the market are large and are made of ceramic. Unlike these, the **Petalwell** is very portable and has an instant charge, making it very convenient for the user.

The fact that the **Petalwell** is made in Ireland is totally in the DNA of our business.

It's about keeping things local but also about keeping complete control of our product. We have in-house design, R&D, plastic moulding manufacturing, assembly. . . everything at our factory in Co Carlow.

**What was the best piece of business advice you've ever received?**

Funnily enough, our mother never really wanted us to go into the family business,

because you are always tied to the family business when you do that.

Saying that, she was very entrepreneurial. She taught us to always do things in the now, to act on an idea rather than waiting.

**What's the biggest mistake you've made in business?**

Not taking enough time off to be with our families. Not leaving work on time. Being a family business, we struggle with getting the work-life balance right.

We try not to be away from home for more than seven days at a time or over two weekends in a row.

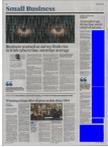
**And your major success to date?**

Having the **Petalwell** available in House of Fraser Dundrum. We are hopeful this will expand to the other locations. We have just had our second re-order from the Wynn Hotel in Las Vegas, an ultra-luxury resort on the Las Vegas Boulevard. We've always focused on making better products of higher quality that people are happy to pay a premium for.

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made products of the highest quality. We make private-labels tools for Snap-on, Weller and others, so the family business has always had to focus on being the best. In many ways the **Petalwell** fits in with that drive for very high-quality products although it's a very different product.

**Who do you most admire in business and why?**

Our dad is an original advocate of keeping it local. In the 1990s, when all manufacturing advice was to outsource, Dad invested in capabilities and machinery enabling Oglesby & Butler to make 98 per cent of their products in Carlow.

While the majority of manufacturing jobs in Carlow have gone (at the sugar factory, Läßle Ireland and Braun), our father's vision is still keeping generations of jobs in the community.

The way he does business, his honesty and integrity, his creativity and quick thinking, his ability to think outside the box and his problem-solving skills are a constant inspiration.

**Based on your experience in the downturn, are the banks in Ireland open for business to SMEs?**

If we didn't have the manufacturing capabilities and the R&D here already we probably wouldn't have gotten as far as we have. It's Murphy's law. When you don't need money you can get it and when you do need it you can't! We have been fortunate overall.

**What one piece of advice would you give to the Government to help stimulate the economy?**

Bring back the scheme for patent royalty dividends, which was abolished November 2010.

This was a tax-free dividend of up to 10 per cent of sales which could be distributed to employees who worked on the patented products. Also the dividends for the shareholders were distributed tax free. It was an incentive to invest in R&D leading to new products sales.

**What's been the biggest challenge you have had to face?**

Continuing to work hard, push through, stay positive. We work in a very traditional, male-dominated environment, so going from making cattle dehorners to making aromatherapy diffusers took a little getting used to!

**How do you see the short-term future for your business?**

We are starting to grow in the US. It's a good market for us - English-speaking and with a huge hotel spa scene. Ninety-eight per cent of the company's products have always been exported and the US market is one we are familiar with.

Retail is also a much bigger area within the spa industry in the States. We envisage lots of late nights, sales calls, travel, creative meetings and R&D.

We'll be traveling to Bologna to the Cosmoprof international beauty fair, where we'll exhibit as part of the Extraordinary Gallery area with support from Enterprise Ireland.

**What's your business worth and would you sell it?**

We wouldn't sell it. Our family is in it for the long haul.

[petalwell.com](http://petalwell.com)



■ Jacqueline Oglesby and Rachel Purcell: "Our family is in it for the long haul." PHOTOGRAPH: BARRY MCCALL