

**WINCANTON-BASED SKIBZ SOAKS UP INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS
WITH AWARD WINNING DESIGNER DRIBBLE BIB**

A Wincanton-based business has expanded into international markets thanks to an original design concept and the support of UK Trade & Investment.

Skibz produces a range of designer baby accessory dribble bibs. The distinctive design is half-bib, half-scarf, meaning that the bibs are both comfortable and stylish enough to be worn throughout the day, rather than just during feeding.

The company was technically established in 2004 when founder Helen Bristol first thought of the concept, although she waited until her baby went to school in 2007 before she began to really concentrate on developing the business.

In 2008 Helen worked out which business partner in China would manufacture the bibs, using her designs and made to her specifications, and soon after the products began to hit the streets. Skibz initially began selling a couple of hundred of bibs a month through just ten shops in Somerset.

Keen to expand into international markets, Helen signed up to UKTI's Passport programme in April 2008 and began working with International Trade Advisor Hilary Charman. **Helen** explains:

"I knew nothing about exporting before I began working with UKTI. The mentoring you receive is invaluable, especially as it allows you to ask the silly questions that don't tend to get addressed in official literature. The free courses were also high calibre and gave a really good grounding for all the basics of international trade – from marketing your product overseas, to understanding cultural challenges and even presentation skills. Most importantly they can put you in touch with useful people and help to ensure you're in the right place at the right time to seize a new opportunity."

By Hilary's recommendation, and with grant support from UKTI, Skibz attended its first international trade show - Germany's 'Kind and Jugend' or 'Baby and child' fair - in September 2008. As a result of attendance, Skibz established distribution deals with six countries and were also finalists in the prestigious Kind and Jugend 'Innovation Award' in the 'World of Baby Care' category.

Helen continued to work with UKTI after the event to develop her international trade strategy. Most recently she secured Slovenia and Australia as new Skibz markets in May 2009.

Today Skibz distribute in 14 countries, including the UK, and 25% of its business is now generated by exports. International sales have served Skibz well as there are now ten people in the team and 5000 bibs are sold a month through 250 independent retailers, John Lewis stores and direct sales from the Skibz website.

The accolades also continue as in July 2009 Skibz received a Special Recognition of Achievement award from the Global Women Inventors and Innovators Network at their BFIIN (British Female Inventor and Innovators Award) annual awards ceremony in Cardiff.

Hilary Charman, UKTI International Trade Advisor said: "The Skibz range is really flying off the shelves and that is largely down to Helen's funky yet functional product. Knowing your market is key to success and, having created the prototype Skibz for her own family, this really shines through in her design. We look forward to continuing to work with Helen as she expands her international reach and takes Skibz to the rest of the world."

Further information on Passport to export and the full range of UKTI services is available from the International Trade Team on 0845 6060969.

Notes to News Editors

Skibz

www.skibz.com

UK Trade & Investment

UK Trade & Investment is the government organisation that provides integrated support services for UK companies engaged in overseas trade and foreign enterprises seeking to locate in the UK. It brings together the work of teams in British embassies and FCO posts overseas and government departments across Whitehall. In England, international trade support is coordinated by nine International Trade Directors working in partnership with each Regional Development Agency. UK Trade & Investment services are delivered locally through a network of International Trade Teams. The devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own arrangements for local delivery of services. For more information visit the web site www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk

GWE Business West

The South West UK Trade and Investment service is delivered by GWE Business West, a leading membership and economic development organisation delivering an extensive range of services to businesses. As a powerful voice for business we play a major role in shaping and supporting economic growth and success.

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