



Adelphi and LittlePod – 10 years of success!



Adelphi Manufacturing customer LittlePod are the only manufacturer of real vanilla paste in the UK, and proudly fill and distribute their products from their premises in the heart of the beautiful East Devon countryside. Alongside their trademark paste, they also offer chocolate and coffee extracts, and have co-created ranges of vanilla shortbread and vanilla beer.

The driving force at the core of the business is their mission; to raise awareness of the worrying shortages of real vanilla, which at the time of LittlePod's conception in 2010, was facing extinction, perhaps within a generation. Owner Janet Sawyer had a vision for a company which would help communities which rely on vanilla cultivation, to conserve the fragile ecosystems in which real vanilla is grown. To do this, Janet envisioned a product which would raise awareness of the diverse applications of real vanilla, and of its benefits when compared to real vanilla's synthetic counterpart, artificial Vanillin, which counts for 97% of Vanillin used in the West. A 1% incursion into the Vanillin market would double the need for real vanilla worldwide.

One of LittlePod's first acts was to help establish a vanilla farmer named Made in the Bali community where his father had farmed vanilla before him. As a result, Indonesia, once the number one suppliers of vanilla, is now considering reviving its vanilla industry. "Encouraging farmers to keep cultivating their vanilla vines is essential", said Janet, "because the soils devastated by palm oil farming need to be replenished and it is proven that the vanilla vine planted among tutor trees can do this". Vanilla vines act as drainpipes due to the shape and hang of their leaves, catching and funnelling precipitation down into the roots in the soil, making them an excellent choice of plant to restore landscapes ravaged by previous 'slash-and-burn' crop rotation policies.

LittlePod's real vanilla paste also minimises wastage for users by ensuring that as many vanilla pods as possible are utilised. "Chefs were only wanting to use the long, straight vanilla pods, and were rejecting all others", explains Janet. "Our paste gives a value to ALL pods, which maximises profit for vanilla farmers, and chefs now love the functionality of our tubes". Chef Jamie Rafferty describes LittlePod's vanilla paste as "quality, convenience and affordability, all in a tube!"



Adelphi Manufacturing

LittlePod have come a long way from their humble beginnings as a one-woman operation, when Janet had the idea at her kitchen table of putting vanilla paste into a tube; they now employ eight members of staff at their home site, all with a passion for the products and their mission. LittlePod products are now stocked throughout the UK and abroad, as far afield as Hong Kong, Nepal, Qatar and Australia, and their distribution footprint extends to cover sixteen countries. In 2018, they won the Queen's Award for Enterprise, in the Sustainable Development category.

In 2012, when Janet was ready to investigate the first steps towards automation, she discovered the Manufacturing Advice Service, who put her in touch with the Food Innovation Service, who in turn recommended Adelphi as a UK-based manufacturer and supplier of process and packaging machinery.

Adelphi Manufacturing's Sales Director Dean Willis was immediately captivated by the LittlePod story. Janet enthuses that "his honest advice and support was invaluable - Dean monitored our company growth, and recommended machines accordingly, making sure we didn't overstretch our resources".

In 2012, Adelphi were pleased to manufacture the Response base unit to suit LittlePod's needs; a semi-automatic volumetric benchtop unit, the Response efficiently fills a wide range of product viscosities, including LittlePod's extracts and pastes, with equal ease. The Response is quick to assemble and clean, meaning that changing between products and containers is as easy as possible and production downtime is kept to a minimum; LittlePod can swiftly switch from filling paste into 100ml aluminium tubes, to extracts in 100ml glass bottles, as required.

Response



"Adelphi Manufacturing's values match LittlePod's perfectly", said Janet when asked about the success of the relationship between the two companies – "they really care". Adelphi's environmentally friendly premises (which won the PPMA 2018 Environmental Initiative of the Year Award), reflect the commitment to sustainability issues and environmental protection at the heart of LittlePod's mission.

Thanks to LittlePod, real vanilla will now be available for the next generation. Janet modestly comments that "LittlePod may only be a small part of this, but we are nevertheless contributing by achieving our aims and raising awareness. It's been an incredible journey, from an idea in my head to a Queen's Award, and Adelphi Manufacturing helped this vision become a reality!" Janet has been quick to stress the importance of LittlePod's "organic growth", assisted by Adelphi, which has seen automation applied to her unique business without compromising the values at its heart.



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Adelphi Manufacturing's Dean Willis, pictured in 2018 at the Littlepod site, with their Response Benchtop Filler

In 2017, a new phase of growth began for LittlePod...

On March 7th 2017, a hurricane hit Madagascar, wiping out 80% of their 5 year vanilla crop. It was sink or swim time for LittlePod, who had to double their prices overnight. Extraordinarily, having built such warm emotional connections with her customers, they did not lose a single one! Faced with a decision to step forward or step back, Janet chose to step forward and invest...

By 2018, Janet's product popularity and production demands were increasing further than ever before. In the context of a small business facing the political and economic turbulence of Brexit, she was buoyed by the confidence their Queens Award was inspiring, and soon realised that other businesses wanted to be associated with hers.

HSBC bank came forward and offered Janet the funding she would need to purchase her next machine; the TGM E250Matic tube filler and sealer, which had been recommended by Dean. "They could see that we've consistently gone in the right direction", she says - "slowly and surely. They saw our steady year-on-year increase in orders, and knew we were going places".

Adelphi are proud to have been the sole UK agent for TGM machinery since 1995. LittlePod's TGM machine project, from purchase to delivery and installation, was a collaboration between many parties.

When Janet came to the realisation that her premises would need to be expanded to accommodate the new machine, a local builder, touched by her outreach work, offered to undertake the alterations at cost price. "Janet – you're someone who gives back", she remembers him saying. LittlePod's outreach work is at the heart of their ethos; Janet is now an Enterprise Advisor at a local college, and regularly upskills her apprentices, offering business development advice to those who, inspired by her story, harbour ambitions to start their own businesses. During a recent trip to Tanzania, Janet met a young local farm worker named Irene, who had recently passed her accountancy exams, and she has invited Irene to undertake a three month long internship at LittlePod in 2020!

Apprenticeships and staff development are very much at Adelphi's heart also; they were delighted to win the Best Manufacturing Apprenticeship/Training Scheme at the 2019 Made in the South East Awards.



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With the machine order nearing completion towards the end of 2019, LittlePod CEO Olly, along with employees David and Caroline, flew out to TGM's premises in beautiful Bergamot, Italy. Here they met Dean and underwent machine training, as well as officially signing-off the purchase (a process known as a Factory Acceptance Test).

Fast-forward to January 2020, and back in Devon, builders opened up a wall in LittlePod's premises to fit the machine in on delivery day! It now proudly stands on a new floor reinforced with recycled concrete. "Delivery and installation didn't go 100% smoothly", laughs Janet, "but the important thing is that everyone left happy".



LittlePod employees and Adelphi engineer Steve, with the TGM E250Matic

"I'm Lady Luck!" she says. "At LittlePod we make our own luck. I was told by so many parties 'it's your risk', but this has paid off. Fortune favours the brave!"

Confidence in LittlePod's products and their business is justifiably at an all-time high. "People are coming to us with substantial orders that we never would have considered before", says Olly. 2020 is the year of LittlePod's 10-year anniversary, and Adelphi Manufacturing are proud to have been by their side during this extraordinary journey.