

Getting a new product noticed involves some innovative thinking, writes Sandra O'Connell

When Cork woman Veronica Kenneally launched her range of crisps just over a year ago, her biggest challenge was to overcome the perception that crisps have no place in a healthy diet.

Veronica's Snacks crisps are baked rather than fried, low in fat and gluten-free — but with virtually no budget for marketing, she had to be creative to get her message across.

In an effort to reach out to healthy eaters, Kenneally contacted the organisers of 5k and 10k fun runs nationwide.

"When participants run a race like that, they typically get a goody bag, so I got in touch with a number of race organisers and negotiated with them to have our crisps put in race goody bags," she said.

As a result, thousands of health-conscious consumers were introduced to the brand. Veronica's Snacks now employs four people and supplies health food shops and supermarkets across Ireland. She is looking at exporting to the UK.

Her early marketing coup cost her nothing but stock. "We simply hadn't the budget for a big launch but we were very successful with what we did," she said.

Kenneally found the key to most start-ups' product launches: get the biggest possible bang from what is, typically, a limited buck.

Sarah Bohan, managing director of Engage Ireland, a PR and marketing firm, says that when mounting advertising campaigns in local and trade press, negotiate some editorial coverage.

"This will not work for national newspapers but it will work for local and trade press," said Bohan. "If possible, send samples to selected media to generate interest but keep it targeted. If it's a food item, send it to food writers. If it's a food item with a business angle, send it to business writers too."

Templates for press releases are freely available online. "There is a standard industry format and that's what you should follow, recognising that the headline is what makes the difference between being read and being deleted. So make yours a newsworthy and engaging one."

The first paragraph should tell the story in a nutshell. "Don't keep the best until last," she said. It might go unread.

Simply having a new product or service to launch is not enough. "It



Kenneally handed out 'goody bags' of her low-fat crisps at fun runs to introduce the brand to health-conscious consumers. 'We hadn't the budget for a big launch,' she says

retailer signed up. This will give it a better chance of being picked up."

Upload your press release to free sites such as Irishpressreleases.ie. "This has the added benefit of improving your search engine optimisation, enabling more people to find you online," said Bohan.

You must also choose between a "hard" or "soft" launch. The former is a "big bang" approach, typically involving a launch event plus advertising to back it up. A soft launch involves putting out the product quietly and building its profile more

quality images as soon as possible," she said.

Bohan recommends getting professional photography. "Make sure to get a mix of standard product shots and ones with a white background that can be superimposed if required," she said. "Get some pictures of the item in use and some of the people behind the business to make sure you have all the angles covered."

PR Slides, an online picture hub for journalists, was set up just over a year ago. According to Niall Har-

a month to have images stored on the site. Harbison, who previously co-founded the social media marketing company Simply Zesty, believes an effective launch can be achieved very cheaply, thanks to social media.

"You don't need to spend money on expensive software now when there are so many resources, such as Google Apps, available for just a few hundred euros," he said. "Why spend a few thousand on a website that you have to drive traffic to, when you can leverage someone

Gartland knew exactly what to do when it came to launching his flavoured poitin, last year.

For any product launch to work, you must first identify exactly who your target market is, he said.

"Align yourself with the market," he said. "In our own case, we looked at the brand as if it were a person — how it would look and talk, where it would live, what kind of car it would drive. In that way we developed its core values and from there its personality — and that's your

NEIL DANTON



WE LOOKED AT THE BRAND AS IF IT WERE A PERSON: HOW IT WOULD LOOK AND TALK

drinks companies with serious marketing budgets.

"We took a stand at the National Ploughing Championships and gave out free samples on the basis that if we could get the approval of rural Ireland, we'd be on to a winner," said Gartland. "It was just the element of theatre we needed. They [places] are expensive but if you book at the last minute you can often negotiate a good deal."

Behind all that was a Facebook page. "We set it up quietly and simply mailed the link to friends and family. Within days it had more than 5,000 likes," said Gartland.

"Poiitin has always been an underground drink, so it plays to the strength of this kind of underground marketing. We don't have the budgets for big agencies but we have engaged a social media expert to drive that further. Facebook is brilliant when you are launching a product. It's the perfect way to engage with your market."

When it was time for Alan Dowling of Visual Brand Communications (VBC) in Castlebar to launch his new product, the world's first artificially intelligent hologram, to corporate clients, he also took a creative approach to the challenge posed by a limited budget.

"We used Fiverr.com, a website where people will do all sorts of services for just \$5 (€3.70). We made an entire promotional video using Fiverr for just €80, proving it really is possible to do things with no budget," said Dowling, who went on to secure €360,000 in investment funding.

Later this month the company will complete its first commercial installation: a health and safety training hologram created for oil company Shell.

VBC is also in negotiations to roll out hologram products to an international sports retailer.

When it comes to launch marketing, talk is cheap but invaluable, says Dowling, who is working with customers in sectors as diverse as shopping malls, banks and hospitals, for holograms that can provide guiding services.

"In Ireland there is a culture where people don't talk about what