

'A beautiful aroma in your house will make it feel happy'



Debbie Knight, 56, lives in Wimbledon, London, and has a grown-up daughter.

I was visiting a lovely boutique hotel in Florence, Italy, in the winter of 2005 when I first came across the fragrance that would change my life. It was a special holiday, booked to mark the end of my treatment for breast cancer. I soon noticed that everywhere in the hotel the air was filled with the most amazing scents, subtle but evocative, and I was hooked.

I discovered the aromas were dispersed using reed diffusers, the first time I'd ever come across them. The reeds, usually made from rattan, soak up the liquid fragrance in the bottle and circulate a continuous aroma. I knew straight away I wanted to bring these fragrances to the UK – I knew others would love them, too. Although I'd never run a business before – my job was

previously in events – I felt confident enough to set up a meeting with the supplier in the hope of distributing his products in the UK. And I was delighted when he said yes.

Borrowing £25,000 from my then-husband, I ordered 1,000 bottles in four different scents and paid a designer to create a website for my business, Senti. Next, I hit the road, visiting shops I thought may be interested in stocking the products. It was exhausting, and I had many 4am starts and sleepless nights, wondering if I'd done the right thing. Eventually, orders began to come in, and after a couple of years, I was selling

enough to rent a shop near my home. I opened in 2011 and quickly built up a loyal customer base, doubling my sales each year. I could hardly believe it when, two years later, I was accepted into several major department stores, too, including Liberty and Harrods. By 2015, my turnover had grown to £1million.

All that changed in 2016, when the owner of the Italian fragrances decided to distribute his products himself. It was a huge blow and came at a time when I was splitting from my husband. Still, I was confident I could start again – this time launching my own products. Using

all the knowledge I'd picked up, I worked with two major perfumiers to create new fragrances, including my now-bestsellers, Jasmine & Geranium, and Bergamot & Ginger. Working for myself meant

I had complete creative control over the finer details, too, like finding a glass-blower to supply me with beautiful bottles, and having my logo redesigned.

I relaunched in September last year, selling from a new, smaller shop where my products sell from £38 for a 100ml room spray to £47 for a 200ml reed diffuser. I advise people to place the diffusers at hip height near a door so the air flow carries the fragrance, and to turn the reeds every few days. They should last for four months and you can keep the reeds when the fragrance runs out to use in the car or shoe cupboard – the scent lasts a long time.

At this time of year, people love the traditional aromas of orange, pine and woods – they get you in the festive mood. Incredibly, reed diffusers now outsell scented candles, and I feel so proud that I've created my own range:

• senti.co.uk



DEBBIE'S BUSINESS TIPS

- If you don't know the answer to something, ask – there are always people willing to help.
- Be passionate about your product – it makes it much easier to sell if you believe in it.
- Learn from your mistakes, because everyone makes them.

