

Inventors

OCTOBER 2017 Volume 33 Issue 10

DIGEST

GROWING GAINS

Young Inventors' Impact

TEENS' BATH BOMBS HAVE A FUN TWIST

PROLIFIC RENAISSANCE MAN

FATHER-DAUGHTER TEAM, ADVICE & MORE

Learn the Tricks of Going Viral

YOUTUBE CONTENT
WITH MASS APPEAL

Fidget Spinners Are Nothing New

ANCIENT ORIGINS,
MANY MYTHS

Prospects for USPTO Nominee

BACKGROUND
OFFERS CLUES

\$5.95

POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO.
38
FULTON, MO



TEENS' INVENTION IS A BLAST

DA BOMB BATH FIZZERS ARE ALL ABOUT FUN—AND LOTS OF HARD WORK **BY REID CREAGER**

Sisters Isabel and Caroline Bercaw run track in the spring at Edina High School in Minnesota. Although they approach this with their usual 100 percent effort, track season pales by comparison to the amount of fast-paced activity they have come to know in their daily lives.

Not that they're complaining. Their lives have become increasingly busy since 2012, when their idea to make unique bath bombs for a local art fair unleashed a shower of response that hasn't turned off. Now their Da Bomb Bath Fizzers are sold in Target and more than 7,000 stores nationwide, a multi-million-dollar business with 150-plus employees and projected revenue growth of 500 percent over last year.

Fifteen-year-old Caroline, a sophomore, talks about the importance of finding a balance: "We're always working. Sometimes maybe we have to sacrifice some of our friend time or sleep time."

Sister Isabel, 16 and a junior, says that "even during math class, maybe you'll glance over your shoulder and answer an email. Or in the car, you'll already be on a call. Or you'll be hanging out with friends and you'll start answering Instagram Direct messages."

The best-friend siblings agree that it's all worth it. With help from their mother, CEO Kim

Bercaw, and father Ben Bercaw (CFO and COO), they embody the fresh, fun appeal of their business and are always hungry to learn more.

Life-changing art fair

Such initiative dates back to when they were 10 and 11, respectively, and Caroline and Isabel made a few hundred bath bombs for the Minneapolis Uptown Art Fair. Bath bombs are nothing new—but the girls came up with the idea to put a tiny toy or jewelry charm inside each one that would be revealed after dissolving for 5-7 minutes in the water.

Their months-long project sold out in a few hours. They had taken the basic relaxation theme of bath balls and added a novel twist: fun.

"People do love to relax in the bath, but there aren't a lot of bath products that create fun," Caroline says. "We wanted to project that onto our brand."

A year later, a salon owner approached them about selling their products there. As the product gained popularity, it was time to examine the market and the potential for success.

"When we first started researching, we figured out that the bath bomb market was huge," Kim Bercaw says. "The leader in the market makes 22 million bath bombs per year."

The ingredients for the bath bombs aren't complicated: baking soda, citric acid, fragrance oils and cosmetic-grade pigment that won't stain you or your tub. There's also PEG (polyethylene glycol), found in many sports drinks.

Da Bomb's main line features about 15 bath bombs, depending on the time of year. A recent search on the





Isabel Bercaw (left), 16, and Caroline Bercaw (right), 15, came up with an idea that spawned a multi-million-dollar business.

company website revealed a Cozy Bomb, Spooky Bomb, Beach Bomb, Galaxy Bomb, Cherry Bomb, Ninja Bomb (created by the sisters' little brother, Harry), Party Bomb, Bug Bomb, Bling Bomb, "F" Bomb, Cake Bomb, Candy Bomb, Earth Bomb, Treasure Bomb, Sporty Bomb, Quote Bomb, Fortune-Telling Bomb, Hero Bomb, Love Bomb and Groovy Bomb. Every holiday season or couple months, the girls introduce a featured fizzer that is available for a limited duration.

"When we first started, we came up with the Earth Bomb (with a tiny sea creature inside) pretty much right away because we knew we wanted to give back," Caroline says. "On every purchase, money goes toward saving the world's oceans. We donate to different organizations to help clean up the oceans."

Running 'two businesses'

The "sisterpreneurs" are always brainstorming ideas for new bath bombs and surprises, making bath bomb batches, working at mall kiosks and overseeing the business. They work with 12 employees, including a designer and branding agent.

Their parents' help has been essential. In addition to their CEO mom, CFO/COO Ben Bercaw monitors the financial health of the business and oversees production activities. He says Da Bomb has been "a completely unexpected and incredible journey for all of us.

"With the initial success of the product, we knew the girls were onto something special. But when we saw them selling their product to retailers in a corporate meeting or trade show, or the poise they showed when on camera for an interview, we knew this had the potential to be even more."

All bombs are handmade in Minneapolis with plenty of help, Kim says. "We have over 150 employees during the fourth quarter (most of them making the bombs), shipping, packaging, all sorts of stuff. We are our own manufacturer. Our packaging is made locally, and all raw materials are purchased domestically."

Isabel says the company has a design patent pending on the packaging. "We can't patent the formula, because anyone

can make bath bombs. We designed our own packaging and worked with a designer to bring it to life. We're pretty far along in the process."

The family estimates that it sells about 500,000 bombs a month, more during the holidays. But where do they get all of the surprises that go inside the bombs?

"Some of them originate overseas," Kim says. "They're not made domestically. But we do deal with U.S. distributors, and we also purchase surprises that are made in the U.S. whenever possible."

She says the family recently closed on a warehouse to house the bombs and materials. "We had been renting a building and occupied more than half of it—40,000 square feet," she says. "So we just purchased it."

Isabel notes that "we're running two businesses right now: a production and shipping business for making all the products and getting them out to people, and we're also building a brand. It's a lot of work.

"We never set out to be bath bomb manufacturers, but it worked out well because we have a lot of control. We can do more experiments, and we can experiment with new products in our test kitchen. There are all sorts of beneficial things to having your production in house."

Wide-open futures

The running-the-brand part of the business that Isabel refers to includes marketing. She says Instagram is the company's largest social media presence.

"I was Googling our products on YouTube, and there are many pages of bath bomb videos. I love seeing people use our product and giving reviews and feedback; that's really fun. People buying our bath bombs are mainly women ages 12 to 55, but they're buying them for everybody."

The teens' connection with the public is a natural extension of their social nature.

"They made it very clear early on that they didn't want to give up a traditional education," Kim says. "It's pretty easy to do an online school these days, but they very clearly did not want that. We continue to support their being in school each day, which I think is awesome.

Now hopefully they won't miss out on too much of what everybody gets excited about—like homecoming, friends, all that stuff that people like to remember."

She says their participation in track for 6-8 weeks in the spring satisfies their need



for regular interaction with peers and gives them somewhat of a break from the business: “We make efforts to give them a balance because they’re still growing up and they’re still figuring out what they want to do with their lives—believe it or not,” she says with a laugh. “They seem really content right now, but Ben and I always encourage them that when they go to college, maybe they stay close to the business, and maybe they don’t. You don’t want to limit them.”

Caroline agrees. “We definitely know that we want to go to college, but it would be interesting to explore something other than business. ... And we know that there’s a lot more to business than we think, and there’s so much more to learn. Who knows? Maybe I’ll decide I want to major in business, and I’ll have our company as a model. I do think I’ll want to work for myself.”

“Working for yourself is a lot of fun,” Isabel says. “Whatever I do, I’ll be able to take my entrepreneurial skills with me because owning a business really is doing everything. No matter what I do, I have a lot of options now, thanks to starting this business.”

Ben Bercaw says the experience has also taught the girls the value of teamwork and open communication.

“As many small business owners and operators know, we all wear many hats. Our family is fortunate in that our interests and strengths complement each other. We are free to insert ourselves in what could be perceived as another’s area of responsibility, and the support is welcomed. In other environments, one may feel threatened by this, but we often end up with a better solution or outcome.”

Although the sisters are running a business earning multi-million-dollar profits, they don’t seem to think about it.

“The only time that we really understand how much it’s changing our lives is when someone asks us if it is,” Isabel says. “Then we realize. We take a look back and we think, ‘Oh, wait, maybe it is.’ But running a business to this extent is pretty time consuming. You’re lucky if you get a shower twice a week.”

Details: Dabombfizzers.com

Isabel Bercaw and her sister Caroline were 11 and 10, respectively, when they first made their unique bath bombs for a Minneapolis art fair—and sold out within a few hours.

