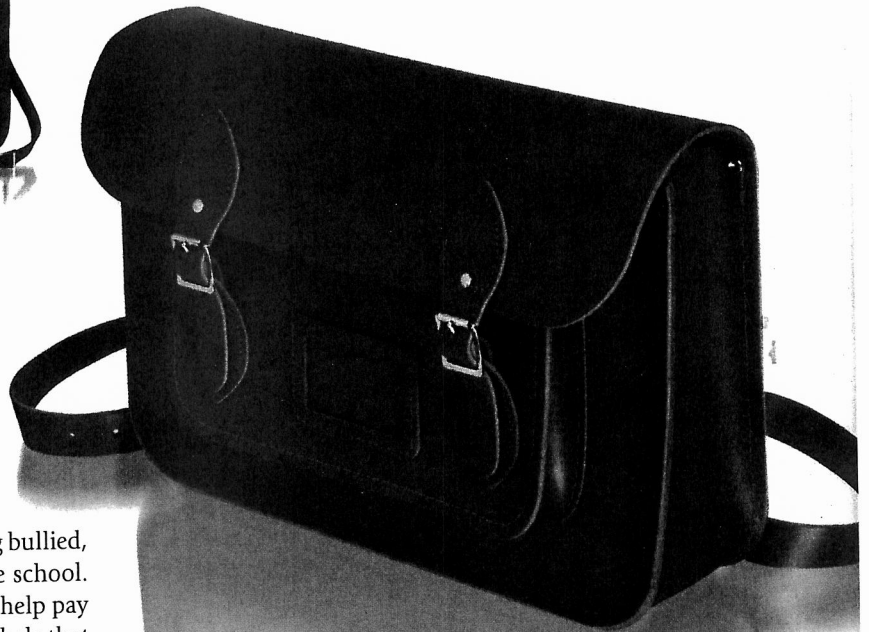
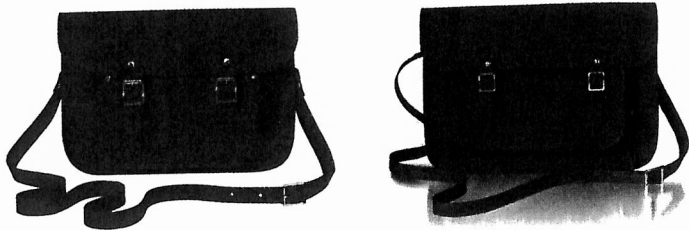




# The Cambridge Satchel Company



By creating quality British-made satchels and with the endorsement of fashion bloggers around the world, Julie Deane has developed a global fashion brand

**W**hen she found out that her daughter was being bullied, Julie Deane moved her to a different, private school. While hunting for a business idea that would help pay the fees, Julie struggled to find the traditional school satchels that she wanted for her children. Thinking she had identified a gap in the market, Julie used the internet to find a leather supplier and a manufacturer who could turn her idea (inspired by what Harry Potter might have taken to Hogwarts) into reality.

Although the Cambridge Satchel Company originally targeted the school market, demand only took off when the colourful satchels became 'a cult among twenty-something fashion bloggers' (according to the *Guardian*). Celebrities Alexa Chung, Fearne Cotton and Daniel Radcliffe are fans, and progressive fashion brand Commes des Garçons and top London fashion designer Erdem gave the satchels high-end fashion credibility.

A recent blip for the Cambridge Satchel Company came when it was forced to take its old manufacturer to court for using its designs and materials to set up a rival brand. In a difficult but important triumph, Julie's company won the case against the manufacturer for infringement of intellectual property rights.

I caught up with Julie to talk about success, fashion and how the difficulties she has faced have made her more determined to succeed.

## Julie talks about...

### ...determination

'Something amazing can happen when you're determined. For me, nothing could be more motivating than seeing my child being bullied. The worst things can push you to do something remarkable. First you need to ask yourself, "what is my dream?"

Then, "what do I need to do to make it happen." We all have an inner reserve of determination.'

### ...being enterprising

'I have always been a hard worker. I remember going to my dad's work when I was younger and seeing his colleague stuffing envelopes. I offered to do the job for a pound. It felt like a lot of money to me at the time and taught me that hard work pays.'

### ...strong support

'When I came up with the idea for my business some people told me that satchels would not sell as they were out of fashion or if it was a good idea, it would have been done already. Luckily my mum was behind me saying "you can do it". I was lucky to have someone so supportive in my corner.'

### ...the first break

'While surfing the net I discovered that Harry Potter was filming locally. I eventually made contact with the props department and asked if they would like to use my satchels. They were already sorted but gave me the name of a props shop in London that might like my bags. This became the first shop in London to sell my products. I find people are very helpful when you explain to them what it is you are trying to achieve and why.'

### ...creating fashion

'I would occasionally buy Vogue magazine but I never thought I would be in it! When it came to designing the satchels, I focused on what I like to wear myself. I have always been a fan of classic bags. When Mum and I chose the colours for our first range we used a colour chart in a paint shop and the label off a plastic carrier bag. They were colours that appealed to us and people in the fashion industry loved them.'

### ...nurturing the business

'For me, starting a business is like raising a child — the challenges you face change as it grows. In its infancy the main challenge is to create a demand. Then as the business grows you face a new set of challenges, like how to keep up with demand. Once you are successful you need to protect your product by understanding intellectual property rights so that no one can steal your design. No 2 years have been the same.'

### ...being cautious

'I set up the business with just £600 and was determined not to go into debt. I tried to keep overheads as low as possible as I wanted all the money for school fees. Initially I worked out of my kitchen but as demand grew there were boxes of satchels everywhere and we needed more space. Demand continued to increase and I felt confident enough to rent an office.'

### ...fashion bloggers

'When I went to my first New York fashion week I gave out invitations for afternoon tea to all of the fashion bloggers who had supported me over the years. I found a lovely tea shop and said "I'm here to say thanks and this is the nearest I can get you to my kitchen".'

### ...the recession

'All our products are made in the UK and this has probably benefited our business during the recession. Customers are keen to support a British brand that provides British people with jobs. It makes people feel good. The bags are also handmade quality satchels that are designed to last. This is important at a time when people can't afford to keep replacing cheap alternatives.'

### ...new responsibilities

'When we set up the business it was just me and my mum. We didn't have any overheads. Now we have 85 people on the payroll, which is a really big responsibility. No matter what happens we have to make over £100,000 a month just to pay our staff. This might be easier for directors of a big business as they did not build it from the grass roots. They are used to dealing with big numbers and they can always resign. I know a lot of people are depending on me for their income.'

### ...a lesson learnt

'A manufacturer that I worked with and trusted used some of my designs and equipment to set up a rival brand. I was so angry but it also gave me strength. Within 2 days I had set up a new factory. Now I have to think before taking people at face value. In the early days before I could afford lawyers I had to rely on trust but now it

## Box | Key facts

- Julie started the Cambridge Satchel Company with £600.
- The company currently employs 85 staff and turns over £1 million a month.
- The company's Leicester factory makes 500 handmade satchels a day. Cambridge Satchel is looking to move to a larger factory with increased capacity.
- Five other manufacturers produce bags for the company.
- The satchels sell in over 110 countries.
- During New York fashion week, department store Bloomingdale's dedicated all eight of its display windows to showcasing the Cambridge Satchel Company's bags.

is important that I invest in intellectual property rights to protect my brand and customers.'

### ...achieving goals

'When I was at primary school in Wales, a girl in my village was accepted into Oxford University. The whole community was so proud and it made a big impression on me. I was determined to go to a top university. From a young age I have been able to identify what I want and how to get there. I finally got to Cambridge when I was 17.'

### ...common sense

'It's not all about what you learn, it's about applying your knowledge. You can't know everything. You have to be resourceful and know where to go to get more information. As a student you are not just being tested on what you study, you need common sense. In an exam if the question is not the one you want, think about it in a different way. A brilliant lecturer at Cambridge said, "If the only thing you learn from me is how to be organised then I will have done my job."

### ...advice to myself at 17

'If I could travel back in time I would tell my 17-year-old self to lighten up a bit. I used to worry about everything too much and blame myself for things that I couldn't control. Don't worry about the things you can't change. My advice would be to hang out with positive people who give you energy.'

## Useful sites



You may recognise Julie's story from her appearance in one of Google Chrome's 'The web is what you make of it' adverts. See the clip here: [www.tinyurl.com/camsatch](http://www.tinyurl.com/camsatch)

The next challenge for the Cambridge Satchel Company is a collaboration with Disney and New York fashion week. If you have any questions for Julie tweet @camsatchelco

Yvette Peers is a former A-level business studies teacher who now focuses on writing and providing revision coaching sessions.