

EXPERT PROFILE: Jill Litwin, nutritious packaged food for kids

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At its conception, *Peas of Mind* consisted of one woman, one kitchen, and the goal of providing busy parents access to affordable, nutritious food. Nearly ten years later, her packaged food products can be found in over 1,500 retailers nationwide. How did she do it? (Hint: it involves personally digging in to every aspect of the business and getting advice from those who've done it before.) This week, we asked Jill about how she got to where she is now and the help she received along the way.

Describe the part you play in the good food economy.

My company, *Peas of Mind*, has spent the last 8 years making it easy for parents to feed their kids quick, nutritious meals that even the pickiest eaters will love. What sets us apart is how we reinvent the classic foods kids love, like pizza and fries, and transform them into healthy options with a serving of vegetables in every product. Our mission is to provide busy parents access to affordable and nutritious food that the whole family will love. We are distributed nationwide and we've been on the cutting edge of children's nutrition for nearly a decade. In fact, we were one of the very first businesses to take healthy food for kids seriously as an untapped market.

What are you doing right now that's particularly exciting?

We are really excited to be selling our products into school districts around the country. Because our Peas of Mind baked veggie fries meet USDA standards for vegetables in school lunches, schools can feel good about letting kids eat French fries!

We are also getting ready to launch our new product line in Safeway and Walmart nationwide, which is the result of a long cycle of hard work.

What unique knowledge, insight or expertise do you bring to your work?

For one, I'm not a "foodie", I'm a businesswoman, a new mom, and a Midwesterner, which means I am very similar to my customer base and don't get caught up in precious short-term food trends. That provides me with a great perspective and insight into my market. In addition, I have a unique background – I have a degree in mathematics, and a post-graduate degree in fashion design, giving me a valuable balance of left-brain and right-brain thinking.



How did you come by your expertise?

Experience. Thinking about my business and talking to people and taking a class are all great, but nothing compares to just doing it. I learned so many lessons on the job that I could never have prepared for, but I also became exponentially better. It's hitting the pavement and really doing every single task and figuring it out yourself. I never knew I'd be an expert in everything from the manufacturing line of our products, to negotiating margins, or USDA nutrition labeling rules.

Describe an experience you have had of receiving advice from a more experienced peer.

My friend and colleague owns a packaged food business and has been an incredible source of information, opinions, and reality checks for my business. She's a talented businesswoman and always someone who will give me an honest answer with all the nitty-gritty gory details when I seek her counsel. Her business has been a few years ahead of us in growth so her advice provides a valuable industry data-point for me.

What was the impact of this experience on you? What did you learn about being a good advisor to others?

I learned to get as specific as possible to really maximize the advice or information I wanted to receive. Precise questions generate the best answers and the most actionable information.

That being said, when anyone comes to me for advice, I try to meet them where they are, and sometimes that means they're in a more general "starting-out" phase, which is totally fine. My goal is to provide the best information for their time and resources, regardless of the growth stage of their business.

What are the values and principles that guide you in your work?

Ultimately our customers are kids – so they always come first. We want to give them the healthiest foods possible and make our products as accessible as we can to parents everywhere.



My other guiding principal is to never say no to opportunity. I loathe the word and always strive to find some compromise or another solution, so that if I can't say "yes" I can at least say "I can't do that, but I CAN do this."

Who are the specific allies, peers and/or competitors in the world of good food that you admire most?



OrganicVille – my friend Rachel's company. We grew up in the same town and both started packaged food businesses. I admire her as an ally in the industry who has built an impressive business. It's a pleasure to watch her and her company thrive. She also

offers valuable words of wisdom as Peas of Mind strives toward the milestones she's achieved.