



# LOCKED AND LOADED

How Colin Sapire fired the NutriBullet into the heart of the world's health-conscious population

**A**t one stage in his journey to becoming one of the most successful South African entrepreneurs in history, Colin Sapire slept on the floor of a cockroach-infested Los Angeles apartment. 'We were stationed in the lounge and would watch them crawling around in the kitchen,' he chuckles. 'I've come a long way since then.'

Indeed he has. These days, the kitchen in his new multi-million-dollar home in the mountains of California's Pacific Palisades is more likely a place in which he prepares meals for lavish dinner parties with his famous neighbours, such as late night TV host Conan O'Brien, rather than a breeding ground for cockroaches. It adds to Sapire's very impressive property portfolio, which includes a R221 million holiday home in the elite Sydney suburb of Watsons Bay.

Not that he ever speaks about his wealth, that is. In fact, while holding court with *Man* during a brief visit to Cape Town earlier this month, Sapire

actively avoids the subject of money. He says he always just wanted to make his parents proud. They gave him everything they could, and he wanted to give them something back. So, after completing his schooling in the Eastern Cape, he moved back to his hometown, Cape Town, to study a bachelor of commerce degree. 'I needed a qualification that I could travel with,' he explains. 'My girlfriend – now my wife – and I were travelling, looking for a place to live. Once we ended up in California, there was no turning back. Going to the army and having to fight for something I didn't believe in was not an option for me.'

After moving to the US in the early '80s with just \$600 (then R1 200) to his name, he obtained his public accounting license and built up a small accounting firm in Los Angeles. But, he always disliked the field. Yes, it paid the bills, but it just didn't provide him with much fulfilment. 'I was always looking for opportunities to jump ship from the accounting business

and run a "real" business,' he recalls. 'That's when I met Lenny Sands. He had made a television infomercial that marketed a fitness product called the Body by Jake Bun and Thigh Rocker. I started running the infomercial business from my accounting office and quickly saw massive opportunities.'

So began Capital Brands, a venture that combined their business entities and skills into one company that could execute on their strategic vision. Sapire also built a data and reporting platform, as well as a management team, to really maximise the operational efficiency of this infomercial-type business. But, the idea was to transition a TV-only sales business into one that used all available sales channels and could change TV-marketed products into regular brands sold in all major retail stores. 'Our biggest challenges have been going after those that counterfeit or copy our products, and dealing with all the related legal battles,' Sapire says. 'But, our success in litigating against

# IT'S YOUR STRENGTH IN FIGHTING AND OVERCOMING HURDLES THAT EVENTUALLY DETERMINES THE LEVEL OF YOUR BUSINESS SUCCESS

unethical competitors has made these competitors think twice about copying our products.'

Another challenge was finding strong individuals who did not just blindly follow how things were done in the past, but instead had an entrepreneurial mindset and could come up with new ideas. However, the growth of the company and its innovative reputation for both its products and marketing allowed it to attract a higher calibre of staff. 'Passion is equal to profits, and quality is equal to marketing,' he says. 'Business is a set of problems that continue to challenge you. It's your strength in fighting and overcoming hurdles that eventually determines the level of your business success.'

Indeed, while the company achieved its initial success with gym equipment, it shifted its attention to smoothie makers in 2002. This led to the launch of the Magic Bullet 'upside-down' blender, which they were successful in transitioning from one of the

longest-running infomercials (spending more than R2.6 billion on television media) into an iconic product that was sold in all major retail stores.

'Our belief has always been that our products must solve an important problem for our customers,' Sapire says. 'After scouring the world for unique ideas for making life easier in the kitchen, our team came across many which individually weren't impressive.

With the help of a creative team of designers and engineers, we saw the opportunity to combine them into one machine, and that eventually resulted in our Magic Bullet.'

Given that his team was always keen on health and fitness, Sapire decided to improve his own health and fitness too. He began using an expensive blender that would allow him to easily consume larger amounts of vegetables to support his nutritional needs. Unfortunately, there was a bit of a problem. 'The cumbersome blender was best suited to

## OVERCOMING THE FEAR OF FAILURE

**'You have to work to avoid failure, but experiencing failure is critical to your learning. Business is a set of problems that need to be dealt with methodically. Failure isn't something to fear. Handling it calmly and with the right perspective is critical.'**

## TIPS FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS

- 1 Get in great shape**  
'Many entrepreneurs underestimate the importance of having a healthy body and mind, as this will help you perform much better. To succeed in business, you need every bit of strength you can muster as you will go through extremely testing situations, often for prolonged periods of time, and you need to be able to cope well with the effects of that.'
- 2 Apply common sense and think methodically**  
'Don't rush big decisions. I got into little ventures with people who thought they had all the answers and watched them fail because they thought they were smart. Don't overestimate your intelligence. An excellent idea or product concept is only as good as the plan that goes with it.'
- 3 Take smart risks**  
'Business degrees and high qualifications are great, but I've often seen them used as reasons not to take risks. Calculated, well-thought-out risk-taking can be the difference between being successful and being super successful.'
- 4 Don't be a follower**  
'At university, I was taught the Ford Motor Company model of running a business. If I had followed that model, my business would have failed. You have to think out of the box, and understand the unique challenges and opportunities your business presents. There are many great companies that inspire me, such as Apple, but their model is not right for our business.'
- 5 Don't believe the hype around market research**  
'Marketing execs spend millions on market research that really tells them very little. If we had conducted market research, we would never have made the NutriBullet. We knew we had a great product and our perspective was "how can we change the market" not "what does the market say?"'

## COVER COLIN SAPIRE

making large quantities, and difficult to use on a daily basis,' Sapire recalls. 'Our team saw an opportunity to develop an appliance that would make it easy to make healthy single-serve vegetable smoothies. All we needed to do was develop a bigger, more powerful Magic Bullet. However, it was not that easy.'

It took a couple of years, but when they tested a final prototype of the first NutriBullet and found that it could do 90% of what a large commercial blender could, they realised they had made a breakthrough. Indeed, while total sales of the original Magic Bullet far surpassed the 30 million mark,

the NutriBullet sold more than 16 million units in less than three years, making it the fastest-selling kitchen appliance in the US, and perhaps even the world.

'I feel incredibly fortunate,' Sapire says. 'The commercial success has been nice, of course, but I get the most satisfaction out of hearing how the NutriBullet has changed people's lives. We get communication from customers telling us how they've overcome illness, lost weight, gained energy, and turned their lives around. To me, that's the most important reward.'

Looking ahead, the company plans to keep on innovating. There is already a more powerful version of the classic NutriBullet (called the Pro) and

a 'super' version (called the Rx). These, together with the enchanting Baby Bullet, should be launched in South Africa once they have permission from the regulators. 'In the next few months, we will be introducing our very exciting NutriBullet Lean programme on TV in the US and soon after that, we will introduce our Veggie Bullet,' he says. 'We are also pretty well advanced in the development of an innovative NutriBullet cooker, which will allow for single-serve nutritional meals.'

It all comes down to Sapire's belief in healthy living. As someone who is not fond of the taste of salads or vegetables, the NutriBullet has been a necessity in helping him support his own transition to good nutrition. By 'NutriBlasting' each morning for the last five years, he's been able to avoid cravings for unhealthy foods later in the day. And, at 56 years young (with 27 marathons completed), he has never felt better.

'Food is the fuel your body and mind need to perform well,' says Sapire, a firm believer that everything – your health, career and relationships – starts with good nutrition. 'As crazy as it sounds, I believe good nutrition allows you to use all of your potential. And that's very important to be a successful entrepreneur.' **Man**

### TOP 3 NUTRIBULLET RECIPES

#### 1. Cholesterol Crusher Blast:

Kale, blueberries, banana, oatmeal, almonds and raw cacao

#### 2. Sleepy Seeds:

Spinach, banana, raspberries, blueberries, pumpkin seeds and sunflower seeds

#### 3. Fountain of Youth:

Kale, avocado, nectarines, blueberries, and walnut halves

### WIN!

To stand a chance to win a NutriBullet, post your thoughts on the July edition of *Man* on our Facebook page or email them to [tfgman@hsm.co.za](mailto:tfgman@hsm.co.za). Include your name and TFG account number.

