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#SheMeansBusiness



## Meet Mariella

Have your cake and eat it



Mariella Forte



Customer feedback has helped us fine-tune the business, everything from our website to the way we send out our

products. Happy customers are my driving force.



It was on a trip to Starbucks when Mariella Forte hit upon the ‘eureka!’ moment that shaped her future career as an entrepreneur. “I noticed that so many people were ordering skinny drinks to cut down on the calories,” Mariella explains. But she’d also observed that there was no low-calorie option when ordering cakes to go with coffee. It got her thinking.

A keen baker since childhood, a 12-year-old Mariella would experiment in the kitchen for hours, often improvising to create her own individual take on traditional recipes. She found that she loved the science of baking—and that love was about to come in handy.

### **A life of baking**

Mariella began to experiment once again, this time developing recipes for sweet treats that delivered flavour without the calories. There were disasters and triumphs in equal measure and over time, a potential product range started to take shape. Applying what she’d learned from a life of baking, Mariella had a strong sense of purpose—in her target customer. “Being someone who watches their weight but who also wants to eat cake every day, I really identified with those people ordering skinny lattes.”

She eventually quit her job in the music industry to launch The Skinny Bakery in 2012, backed by just a few thousand pounds of savings. She admits that financing the business through its first year was a major challenge, but she was undeterred. “If I was going to do a job for 40 or more hours a week, it was really important to me to be doing something I loved.”

### **Rocky road**

The first year saw Mariella establishing her brand and growing a customer base, starting with local shops and businesses in her native West London. Then she set her sights further afield. “It was not easy,” Mariella admits. “In fact, it was a baptism of fire—myself and a few helpers trying hard to sell the cakes in various locations across London. Like cold-calling, but face to face!”

The hard work paid off though, when Mariella secured her first major stockist, Whole Foods Market. Since then, The Skinny Bakery has gone from strength to strength, with Selfridges also becoming a stockist. A major factor has been Mariella's focus on customer feedback. "Our business is built on it," she says.

### Shaping the future

Another factor in The Skinny Bakery's growth was social media. Mariella describes Instagram as "game-changing" for her business, offering an online shop window for her products and earning her customers across the country. It's also a great immediate source of the all-important customer feedback that Mariella relies on. Every day brings new challenges and fresh opportunities to learn as she scales the business. And she's hungry for more. "Building something of my own, creating jobs and making customers happy motivate me," says Mariella. "Once you achieve what you set out to do, it's a great feeling."

Learn more about Mariella Forte and The Skinny Bakery:

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