

# CLAIRE HARPER

SO HERE'S A BIT ABOUT MY BACKGROUND AND BUSINESS EXPERIENCE. In short, I'm a business leader with an extensive track record in marketing, change management, branding and enterprise. I've worked for some of the UK's leading retail brands, including Argos, Ocado, Sainsbury's and Mamas & Papas. My inspirational journey from corporate marketer to fledgling entrepreneur is full of valuable learnings gleaned from implementing innovation and cultural change in influential and progressive brands.

I joined Argos at the time of a hostile takeover, at a time when the brand was struggling to change and innovate. The learning curve in people management, customer insight and technological change was steep, but it formed the foundations of my passion for taking brands to the next level of success. I thrived under the tutelage of influential mentors and in time used my experience to move on to the next challenge.

At the age of 26 I joined the newly-launched Ocado as Head of Customer Acquisition and was soon promoted to Head of Marketing. At the time online grocery shopping was clunky and ineffective but the potential was enormous and I was delighted to be part of the visionary team that helped build the Ocado brand into the customer-focussed, insightful brand it has become.

As well as helping to create the business and watching it grow, my time at Ocado gave me the knowledge and experience required to truly influence the direction of the business, enabling us to fight off competition, turn an entire concept on its head and create a whole new customer-centric space in the market.

Four years later I was headhunted to join Sainsbury's CEO Justin King's new leadership team, with the aim of reinvigorating this flagging brand and make Sainsbury's great again. By now I had the skills Sainsbury's needed to adapt their business plans to reflect the ever-changing retail landscape. During my time at Sainsbury's I successfully launched their multi-channel experience, and consolidated the brand with its customer communications.

With a hunger for a new challenge, I upped sticks and moved to beautiful Yorkshire to be the first ever female board director at nursery retailer Mamas & Papas, a strong family business which had moved from wholesale to retail. Tasked with growing the brand in the UK and abroad, I had to build and strengthen a positive culture, and ensure that the business prioritised understanding the customer at the deepest level.

During my time at Mamas & Papas my husband and I welcomed our first daughter Coco into the family, and I faced the familiar challenge of balancing a successful and demanding career with taking care of a newborn. One of the many subjects I give talks about is familiar to many working women - the challenges of "having it all", and some of the things I learned (and mistakes I made) during my quest for work/life balance.

Our second child India was born in 2011 and this proved to be the catalyst for change that unleashed my inner entrepreneur. In the face of some very appealing job offers from major retailers, I made the determined decision to fulfil a long-held ambition to launch a retail business of my own and took the plunge with both feet.

I launched IndiaCoco in June 2012 from my dining room at home, after spotting a gap in the market for a destination shop which sold original, well-designed and innovative childrenswear, the vast majority of which are designed in the UK. IndiaCoco grew quickly, won lots of awards and became a multi-channel market leader. After a move back to the South with my family in 2016, I decided to go back into retail, consultancy and develop my speaking career. From 2017-2018 I was Marketing Director for Frosts Garden Centres and more recently I have been appointed as a Non-Executive Director for Blue Diamond Garden Centres.

**So this is the inspiration for the expertise I now share with others** - If you're looking for an inspiring and entrepreneurial speaker, non-executive director or marketing consultant, [I'd love to hear from you.](#)

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