

Mums are the word as latest research is set to boost head lice nit-comb sales

Three mums who trade as "Nitty Gritty" accredit their website as being responsible for growing their business from a kitchen-based operation to a half-a-million pound turnover business in just seven years. Oh, and Jonathan Ross had a part to play in this success story too.

Now three women — Amanda Coplans, Gill Newton and Lillian Osterberg — could be all set for another boost with the latest research from the University of Utah (US journal *Pediatrics In Review*, November 2006) that shows that the majority of head lice (nine out of 10) are now resistant to permethrin and phenothrin, the key ingredients used in chemical lotions.

As with many of the best business ideas, the concept of "Nitty Gritty" was borne out of a quest to solve a specific, common problem. Then there was the realisation that the product could equally be in demand from the rest of the population. In the case of the three women, the challenge they faced was head lice, inspired by Amanda's daughter repeatedly getting reinfested with them from other children at school. Amanda's father, a doctor, had warned her against the constant use of insecticide-based treatments usually dispensed for lice — but the question was — what else might work?

Lillian, a masseuse, reflexologist and aromatherapist, came up with the answer — an aromatherapy-based liquid, after the application of which the lice are removed with a specially made comb. This is followed up with another aromatherapy product to deter fresh lice infestations.



Getting to the Nitty Gritty: Gill Newton, Lillian Osterberg and Amanda Coplans offer a solution to lice

But as *The Independent* reported (January 28), the most significant thing about the success of Nitty Gritty is that through the internet, the three entrepreneurs could establish themselves as a successful business without signing up a distribution deal with wholesalers or retailers, instead selling direct to customers via their website, www.nittygritty.co.uk. Contrary to traditional practice, a distribution deal and retailing presence in large pharmacies including Boots and Lloyds has only happened recently, following the establishment of Nitty Gritty as a mass selling product through online sales.

Turnover is expected to exceed £1m for the first time next year and a number of large companies have expressed an interest in buying the women out.

Another ingredient in the Nitty Gritty success story was Jonathan Ross urging Emma Thompson to try the product on his Radio 2 Show, after she told him her family could not get rid of head lice. Ross himself became sold on the product after a previous broadcast on which he complained about the problem and Nitty Gritty sent him free products by taxi.

• Turn to page 6 for the latest research on removing head lice infestations.