

brush with SUCCESS

Six million Tangle Teezers have been sold since the Dragons rejected the idea, says **Angela Monaghan**

Shaun Pulfrey was not the kind of person to be deterred by rejection on *Dragons' Den*. He knew he was on to something with his Tangle Teezer hairbrush, even if they didn't.

As it turned out, he was right.

Pulfrey's revolutionary hair-detangling brushes are now available in more than 60 countries and in Britain's biggest chains including Boots, Hamleys and John Lewis. More than six million have been sold.

He has recently returned from China, where Tangle Teezer is strengthening its foothold and the company is preparing to launch a new product.

Tangle Teezer has enjoyed explosive growth since its launch in late 2007, but success came on the back of a 30-year career in hairdressing and four years' painstaking work on developing a product.

During his time as a hair colourist in Manchester, London and the United States, Pulfrey had developed his own method of detangling clients' hair, but found it frustrating when passing them on to a stylist to see the hair get tangled again.

'I'd almost perfected and mastered my own way of detangling hair. It was looking at the method I was using and thinking if I could take that and form it into a tool, and get bristles from a brush to act differently... the technology needed to be built into the brush and that's what I did.'

In late 2003, while still working in a salon, Pulfrey would use his day off to go to the British Library to research how such a brush might be made. 'I remember walking in with a single paper folder thinking, I wonder how long it will take for this to expand and get bigger.'

Once he had worked out what materials he would need, he took his idea to Oxfordshire manufacturer Data Plastics, which was 'the first to listen to me'. Tangle Teezer is now its biggest customer.

When the product was ready for launch, Pulfrey quit

his job, remortgaged his flat in Brixton and pressed ahead. A business run from his spare room has turned into an empire. Eight Tangle Teezer products are sold every minute around the world and the brush bagged the company a prestigious Queen's Award for Enterprise in Innovation in 2012.

Everything is made in Britain, something in which Pulfrey, originally from Grimsby, takes great pride.

He says that while his appearance on *Dragons' Den* did not lead to funding, it raised the profile of the product and the business. 'The catalyst was *Dragons' Den*. I think I went on at the right time, the Dragons had been proved wrong before so it was basically in the hands of the public.

'My product was visual so I could show you it was working whether the Dragons got it or not. That helped kick-start the next phase. It got people talking. The orders started flooding in on the website.'

Pulfrey created the product to solve one of the hair industry's problems, but he had no idea he was solving a consumer nightmare, too – particularly for mothers who struggled daily to detangle their children's hair.

'We've never advertised. We have been a social media dream with people wanting to tell other people, especially mothers at the school gates. All these stories that came back were amazing.'

It was a bonus when Victoria Beckham took to Twitter unprompted and unpaid to praise Tangle Teezer. Her tweet to millions of followers in March this year that Tangle Teezer's Magic Flowerpot for

children was 'super cute' created a spike in Amazon orders. And in the same month, when model Cara Delevingne was asked what she kept

in her handbag, she pulled out a Tangle Teezer.

But the most rewarding thing of all, says Pulfrey, was the Queen's Award, and recognising he'd created something that was making a difference to people.

The original aim was to improve the condition of hair. 'It was about the hair, not the person. Now it has flipped. It's become about the mother ashamed to take her daughter to school because the daughter would not let her comb her hair. Her daughter now does her own hair and looks the smartest girl in school.'

Tangle Teezer has four products and there's room to grow across established markets and those in which it has an early foothold. Is there more to come? The answer is a resounding yes. 'I'm about to revolutionise another area of the hair industry,' Pulfrey says. Celebrities and consumers: watch this space.

● Tangle Teezer won the London regional heat of the HSBC Global Connections initiative, which aims to identify and reward great British businesses competing on the world stage. For more information, visit www.hsbc.co.uk/globalconnections

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The TV appearance was the catalyst:
I could show people the brush worked



Head start: Shaun Pulfrey's revolutionary product has won celebrity backing



Tangle Teezer
in focus

Turnover £8.5m
Sold in 60 countries
Exports account for
around 75 per cent
of sales

More than six million
brushes sold

Eight Tangle Teezers
are sold every minute

Employs 12 directly in
Brixton, many more in
the supply chain

Transformational
moment Winning the
Queen's Award for
Enterprise in Innovation
in 2012. Pulfrey
believes being
recognised for an
innovative product
was a key moment.

'We had to prove it was
innovative and had
changed people's lives.'