



**BUSINESS PARENT OF THE YEAR 2006**

Sponsored by



Shoo and Angus remembered both their mums had used a 1970s cookbook called *Superscoff*, so they hit on the idea of calling their food brand **Miniscoff**



1. Shoo gets creative in the kitchen 2. Oscar and Imogen are willing tasters 3. Miniscoff makes quality meals for busy mums 4. Imogen and her supermum 5. The Miniscoff team

**'I work with my baby in one hand and my PC mouse in the other'**

**WINNER: Shoo Oliphant, 38, from Wiltshire, was nominated by her husband, Angus, 39. 'Our organic kids' food business, Miniscoff, was my wife's brainchild and she's an amazing multi-tasker,' Angus explains. 'She's looked after our young children, developed the menus, cooked the products and helped to sell them. It's been an uphill struggle but she's been brilliant.'**



Shoo does it all - work and look after baby

hands and packers. By 2004, Shoo had hired a chef and finally managed to hang up her apron in May this year - at five months pregnant. 'It was difficult, especially as I'd developed the business, but I went on my first holiday in four years,' she says.

**Success story**

Now with four Center Parcs outlets selling their food, Miniscoff is a viable business and making a profit. They're no doubt riding the current trend for honest-to-goodness kids' food as espoused by the likes of Jamie Oliver. 'He's done a fantastic job in showing that kids really can be converted to enjoying decent food,' says Shoo. 'The onus needs to be on parents to teach their kids good food values. We should all learn to love our food and enjoy it.'

After the rollercoaster of the past four years and now with new baby Imogen, born in September, Shoo's looking forward to life at a less frenetic pace. 'Freddie's 8 and Oscar's 5, so they're at school now, but I do find it hard to stop,' she admits. 'When it's your own business it's so hard to let go. However, now I'm not tied to the stove, I'm more flexible and can work from home. I'm really hoping to spend lots more time with them now.' **PP**

Shoo gives a whole new meaning to the phrase 'multi-skilled'. Right now, for example, she is giving a phone interview to PP while breastfeeding her youngest child, Imogen. 'We've been hard at it for four years but winning this is a fantastic accolade,' sighs the tired but exhilarated mum-of-three.

Shoo had a demanding job in the fashion industry, as a commercial manager for an Israeli firm based in London. After becoming a mum, she started thinking about her future.

'I'd go to Tel Aviv on business once every six weeks and it was gruelling,' she remembers. 'Security's tight out there and it made me feel vulnerable and nervous. I realised how far away I was from my son, Freddie.'

The agony of a miscarriage added to her pain. 'At the 10-week scan, there was no heartbeat,' she reveals. 'Angus was away in Berlin and I felt so awful. It made me realise I was probably trying to do too much.'

After her miscarriage, Shoo became pregnant again three months later but fretted constantly about losing another baby. Luckily, it all went to plan and Oscar was born in June 1999. 'I carried on working until two weeks before the birth, but afterwards, I decided to test out an idea that'd been knocking around in my head for a while,' she says.

**Testing the idea**

As a working mum, Shoo realised that when kids had outgrown organic baby food, there was very little available other than finger foods such as chicken nuggets or fish fingers. She couldn't find quality, complete organic meals that were low in salt and fat, but convenient to cook.

Shoo and Angus remembered both their mums had used a 1970s cookbook called *Superscoff*, so they hit on the idea of calling their brand Miniscoff. 'I tested recipes on about

30 children and their response was really positive,' she recalls.

Buoyed up by the feedback, Shoo expanded her menu, baking dishes with names such as Curly Wurlly Chicken (that's chicken bolognese with pasta spirals) and Treasure Island Chicken (chicken and sweetcorn pie with potato topping). 'The idea was that there would be vegetables, carbs and protein in every mouthful,' she explains.

Considering her only previous experience of large-scale cooking was rustling up meals for 20 sheep shearers at a farm in Western Australia during a back-packing trip, Shoo had her work cut out. Her husband soon quit his job as an art director at an advertising agency to help design the packaging and deliver the meals to outlets.

'We pitched to a specialist supermarket called Planet Organic in Notting Hill and they agreed to stock our range,' says Shoo. 'We launched Miniscoff officially in March 2000 and were soon selling to 10 outlets.'

But the pressure of working from their two-bedroom flat in Fulham was getting too much, so they decided to relocate to Wiltshire.

**Growing business**

The couple decided they needed a bigger place to run their business from, but Shoo was worried about quality slipping if she didn't cook all of the meals herself.

'We re-mortgaged the house and found a unit in an industrial estate with a one-year lease,' she says. 'So we went in, gutted it and installed a kitchen, where I carried on doing all the cooking.'

Understandably, the burgeoning business took over everything and family life suffered. 'One day Freddie said to me, "Don't people who work have holidays, Mummy?"' remembers

**'One day Freddie asked, "Don't people who work have holidays, Mummy?"'**

Shoo. 'The boys were being looked after by our au pair who was fantastic, but I couldn't help feeling jealous when once, one of them accidentally called her "Mummy". I had to give myself a kick. I realised you can't have it both ways, and that I had to delegate more.'

The business was expanding, though, and by 2002 they'd ventured into restaurants such as Tootsies and the Rainforest Café at London's Trocadero. Soon, the Oliphants were employing kitchen

**MRS MINISCOFF'S TIPS FOR A HEALTHY WORK-FAMILY BALANCE**

- 1 Kids notice if mum doesn't pick them up from school every day, so plan at least **ONE FAMILY ACTIVITY** per weekend to keep your brood together.
- 2 **GET SOME HEAD-SPACE.** I did Pilates and swimming once each per week. It's my chance to switch off and re-charge my batteries.
- 3 Running a business independently can be quite isolating, so **KEEP IN TOUCH WITH FRIENDS** to keep you motivated.
- 4 You can't have it both ways, so if you're going to choose the 'working mother' option, **DON'T BEAT YOURSELF UP** about it or let others judge you.

**BUSINESS PARENT OF THE YEAR 2006** Proudly sponsored by **ARIEL**

Thanks to our sponsor, Ariel Sensitive. For product news and information, log on to [arielsensitive.co.uk](http://arielsensitive.co.uk).