

RED BUTTON

Products designed exclusively for
the aid and humanitarian sectors



INTRODUCTION

Red Button Design designs and manufactures products for the humanitarian market. Founded by Amanda Jones and James Brown in 2007, this inspirational social enterprise is already managing to achieve some of its aspirations for developing nations.

MIDOMO

Midomo is a water purification system that enables vulnerable individuals to independently access safe water, removing reliance on aid workers, engineers, scarce energy resources or an established infrastructure. Taken from any source, water is automatically filtered to a drinkable standard while being wheeled in the 50 litre Midomo.

The initial product has been significantly enhanced following year long field trials that led to the introduction of a new filtration system. Amanda explains: “The new low-pressure filter system requires much less physical energy than the previous system. This makes it easier to use and speeds up the production of clean water.” On the back of the product re-design, the company raised private investment of £235,000.

GETTING INTO THE FIELD

Midomo can reach vulnerable communities via large aid agencies or through partnerships with organisations like FARM-Africa who are already working directly with local people. Amanda is enthusiastic about their recent alliance: “It’s like stabilisers on a bike: having a strong partnership with a known and respected agency like FARM-Africa provides a level of local confidence in the product. And we are also realising our original intention of working with an NGO.”

Around 100 Midomos are currently deployed in Kenya, and recent successful field trials will help see the roll out of the product. To increase the rate of deployment, the Midomo bracelet campaign was launched. Amanda explains: “The purchase of each bracelet covers the donation of a Midomo to an African community. The trial was really successful

with over 50 purchases so far, and we will be running the campaign again at Christmas.”

LOCAL CONNECTIONS

‘Design Against Dependency’ is the company strapline which means: “not putting anything into the community that it does not need, whether products, materials or skills,” explains Amanda.

The Midomo frame is fabricated locally, then dispatched to the nearest deployment zone where the product is assembled and welded using local skills. However, one frustration, explains Amanda, is that: “To retain control over the quality of certified components, ensuring people’s health is not put at risk, and to operate within budget, the manufacture of the Midomo drum is in China for the moment.”

PASSING ON LEARNED SKILLS

Many of the skills learned through the NESTA Toolkit are instilled in Amanda’s thinking, which she shares when new staff come on board: “The marketing and PR tools help ensure we all communicate our message clearly and consistently whether through words or imagery.”

The values tool helps us make informed decisions when considering new relationships, says Amanda: “It helps us to articulate our values and show how we embody them. We can then see how we match with possible partners.”

WORDS OF ADVICE

When starting up, it is important not to avoid what seems complicated or distant, advises Amanda: “I tried to avoid financial spreadsheets and used the easiest scenario to model our business. Looking back, I should have developed a more appropriate model while I had the support to do that. I was forced to look at complexities later and without support. So, don’t focus on the immediate issues or those you can attend to. Make best use of the support available and your peer group spirit.”