

Thorntons' recipe for success

Thorntons, established in 1911, is a widely recognised brand with a reputation of superb quality, innovation, excellent customer service and the finest chocolate recipes from around the world. Thorntons currently operates around 360 company-owned stores and 215 franchises throughout the UK.

A Thorntons franchisee can either be an individual who wants to be a retailer or who is already a retailer. The franchise operates in conjunction with a second offer; which is usually a card and gift shop, or any other complimentary retail offer.

Kay and Gareth Thatcher-Cotes, franchisees for West Kirby and Heswall, spoke to *Business Franchise* about their time with Thorntons.



Kay and Gareth Thatcher-Cotes

When did you become a Thorntons franchisee?

I took over an existing Thorntons and Post Office with a From the Heart card and gift operation in November 2005, which is in West Kirby in the North West. Since then I have opened my second outlet in Heswall, which is a Thorntons Franchise, post office, coffee shop and card and gift operation.

Why did you get into franchising and also what made you choose Thorntons as your preferred franchise?

I have always worked for myself or tried to, as has my husband, Gareth. I decided to take over a Thorntons franchise and Post Office because my friend was selling it and I felt it was an opportunity not to be

To learn more about what it means to be a Thorntons franchisee here is an interview with Kay and Gareth Thatcher-Cotes, franchisees for West Kirby and Heswall



THORNTONS

Retail

missed. I opened my second store due to my success in West Kirby and also because I live in Heswall. When I noticed some premises come on to the market, I took them on. The Heswall store is 2000 sq ft, so it is much bigger in size than my first store, so I also opened a coffee shop, which is proving to be very successful.

What do you think makes a good franchisee for Thorntons?

To be a good franchisee you have to be committed and, more importantly, you have to work in the franchise yourself. I first worked in my West Kirby store covering every role in the business. When I opened the Heswall outlet I installed a store manager in my other store, who knows the business inside out. At my Heswall branch there isn't a job in the store that I don't do – at times I even clean the toilet. Its about hard work and doing it yourself.

What did you do before you took on your Thorntons franchise?

As I had children I worked from home in sales – ladies clothing basically, and Gareth is an engineering consultant.

What have been your highlights of running your two franchises?

Being my own boss. Working for myself means I am very driven to get the money!

What do you feel are the benefits of having the Thorntons brand incorporated in your business?

Everyone knows the Thorntons name. Customers come through the door because of the brand and the quality of the product. It also drives my sales in my other areas!

What advice would you give to anyone thinking of taking on a franchise?

Be prepared for hard work and also do your research. Work in the business yourself and make sure you hire good professional staff, who you train yourself. As I am here, pretty much most of the time, I can do one-on-one training. However, do not expect your staff to run the shop for you.



Heswall Store: Thorntons, Post Office, Coffee Shop and card and gift shop

MORE INFO

INVESTMENT LEVEL:
Minimum investment – £40K;
franchise fee – £12,500

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FRANCHISE CLASSIFICATION: Retail

What other activities do you do to drive sales?

I occasionally do external sales at the key seasons, Christmas and Easter. This is where I go to schools or businesses and set up a table and take orders. It is hard work and you need to find the right places to go. Bigger companies are the better ones to go for. Also opening my Heswall store at times when other places are closed drives sales on holidays, such as Easter Sunday and Mothering Sunday.

Would you do anything different if you could do it again?

With respect to the Thorntons franchise – no. The Thorntons side is easy to manage and run due the brand being very established, really its just a learning curve. I believe I am successful simply because I am hands-on!

Would you take on another Thorntons franchise?

Yes, once I am fully established here in Heswall – I have been here just over 12 months so I need to operate with a hands-on role a little longer. The format may be different though, depending on where I go and size of the unit I take. I may just incorporate Thorntons and just a card and gift offer next time.

I feel that I have done the difficult part now, which is the learning, so opening another wouldn't be as problematic. However, I will say though, being organised is the key to success.

What do you think makes Thorntons different to other confectionery shops?

Moving with the times is important when it comes to the products we sell. Thorntons is bringing new product lines out that are very good. The single origin and organic ranges are moving very quickly here, and there are new lines being developed, which I like.

What are your unique selling points?

A good, all-over service. With Thorntons I feel the extra service I give helps, such as the serving, gift-wrapping and the personalising of the products with icing. My customers are a mix of ages, who are loyal and regular, due to the name and brand of Thorntons and the excellent customer service myself and my staff offer. I also feel the fact I can offer ice cream in the summer is great, especially at the West Kirby store. People travel to West Kirby from Liverpool for the day and they can enjoy an ice cream on their trip.

What are the benefits of being a franchisee rather than being in business on your own?

The answer is simple – the brand, the proven business model and the support I receive from head office. I have a franchise business manager, who always endeavours to help me. If I need help then I know she will always be on the end of the phone to do so. It helps to be organised and have procedures in place like I have. Also, as a Thorntons franchisee I receive a weekly newsletter from head office, which is great as it communicates all the news and information I need to know to help my business. After I have read it, if there is something I need to do, I action it. It helps me to be on top of the Thorntons side of my business.

Finally, do you like chocolate?

Yes I do. Before I was a franchisee with Thorntons, Gareth could always guarantee I'd buy a box of Thorntons chocolate for Christmas or Easter. When I got the store he knew there was no escape!

Thorntons will be exhibiting at the franchise exhibition in March at Olympia, so if you want to become a successful retailer like Kay, why don't you pop along to their stand and learn more? ■