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Love of a 'side hustle' drives growth in the modern successor to Tupperware parties

● Direct sales firms hail rise of the entrepreneur

By **JANE BRADLEY**
Consumer Affairs Correspondent

They are activities as commonly associated with the 1960s, 70s and 80s as cheese and wine evenings and prawn cocktail starters.

But now "direct selling" businesses in the style of classic Tupperware parties and Avon catalogues are seeing a resurgence as more people look for a "side hustle" to supplement their incomes.

The Direct Selling Association said it had seen a 27 per cent rise in the industry over the past year, fuelled by an "increasing appetite for side hustles" and a "more entrepreneurial styles of working".

The £2.67 billion-a-year direct selling sector – which markets to consumers through at-home parties, online through social media channels or face to face – includes brands such as The Body Shop at Home, Usborne Books at Home and Neal's Yard Remedies Organics in a range of products from kitchenware to beauty.

Over a third of the UK population say they have bought products this way.

DSA director general Susannah Schofield said: "Amidst continued decline on the high street, and almost 60 years after brands such as Avon arrived in the UK, direct selling is seeing a revival, with modern-day versions of the classic

"Tupperware-style" parties of the 1960s making a comeback to help deliver an estimated 27 per cent growth for the sector over the last year."

She added: "The current uncertainty on the high street is creating opportunities in other areas of the retail industry, and I predict that we're set to see major disruption to the status quo.

"Direct-to-consumer retail is perfectly positioned to take advantage of this disruption, because not only does this style of shopping fulfil consumer demands for more personalised buying, but the sector's self-employed salesforces are also being boosted by a new generation looking for more flexible, entrepreneurial ways of working."

It is estimated that 563,000 people work in direct selling in the UK. However, the majority of people do so alongside another job – earning an average of around £373 a month from their "side hustle".

In the survey of 21 chief executives from across the DSA's 57 member companies, 67 per cent of respondents reported a "strong start" to 2019, with 31 per cent stating that 2018 had been a "record year" performance-wise for their companies. A further 92 per cent said that they expect to see further growth over the coming quarter.

The Body Shop's direct-to-consumer division, The Body Shop at Home, reported one of the strongest performances, with growth of over 70 per cent during 2018.

Peter Kropp, global director of The Body Shop at Home, said: "One of the key reasons for growth has been the increasing appetite for side hustles and more entrepreneurial styles of working, which has helped to prompt a doubling in the size of our independent consultant salesforce in the UK over the last 12 months, to almost 16,000 people."

Airtight storage container brand Tupperware, which is possibly the best-known direct selling name due to its popular parties held predominantly by housewives in the 1950s to 1980s, closed down operations in the UK and Ireland in 2003. However, other brands have adopted a similar model, with sellers using social gatherings to generate sales and often to also recruit more salespeople.

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COMMENT

“Uncertainty on the high street is creating opportunities and direct-to-consumer retail is perfectly positioned to take advantage of this disruption”

SUSANNAH SCHOFIELD

DSA director general

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PICTURE: GRANGER/SHUTTERSTOCK

↑ Tub thumping: Tupperware's famous parties kicked off the home-party direct selling trend in the 1950s – it is now seeing a renaissance as people look for extra income