

# INSIDE INDIANA BUSINESS

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## Lip Balm Brewed in Indy Kitchen Goes National

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Gosling has hit a high note with a major deal to sell his lip balm in CVS stores nationwide.

Every CVS store in the U.S.—7,432 to be exact—is now selling a lip balm product created in the kitchen of Indianapolis entrepreneur Dan Gosling. A professional trumpet player, Gosling knows the value of a good lip balm in soothing and repairing lips that take a beating from hours of playing a wind instrument. His business model relies on ChopSaver’s all-natural recipe, leaving the major brands feeling a bit chapped. While musicians inspired the product, Gosling says dermatologists—and non-instrument playing customers—have created a crescendo of business that helped him land the deal with the major retail chain.

“If I was going to create something in my kitchen, and I had dreams of competing with a ChapStick, Blistex or Burt’s Bees—brands that have been around for decades and have multi-billion dollar companies behind them—the product better be radically different and dramatically better,” says Gosling.

Gosling believes his lip balm achieves that with its 100 percent natural recipe. The key ingredient in Gosling’s Original ChopSaver is arnica, a sunflower extract and natural anti-inflammatory. Gosling first heard about it when he was a trumpet instructor; a marching band collision left one of his students with a severe bruise on his lips that he mentioned he treated with arnica.

“I thought maybe I should be the one to create a product around this mysterious ingredient,” says Gosling. “So that’s what I did; I became obsessed with the idea of creating a better lip balm.”

Working “like a mad scientist” in his kitchen for two months, Gosling says his wife was convinced he was having a midlife crisis. Gosling notes 10 of the 19 ingredients are certified organic, “whereas a lot of commercially available lip care products are petroleum-based—sometimes as much as 50 to 60 percent petroleum—with maybe some other waxes or chemicals and preservatives.”

Gosling notes his recipe combines the healing properties of plant extracts arnica, comfrey and calendula with natural moisturizers, such as avocado oil, shea butter and aloe.

“Every ingredient in my product, at some point, has been studied clinically or medically,” says Gosling. “Everybody I gave this home brew to—and these are professional musicians—said ‘this is the best stuff I’ve ever used.’ That’s when I knew I was really on to something.”

Gosling launched his home business in 2004, and endured “a tough flog for those first couple years.” ChopSaver soon got a bump in business from sales in music stores, followed by dermatologists who began offering the product in their offices to help combat lip dryness caused by common acne medications.

Sales climbed 30 percent in 2009, then ChopSaver earned shelf space at Kroger stores in Indianapolis, Fort Wayne and Bloomington. When sales plateaued, Gosling made a conscious decision to “up my game.” He began networking and partnering with companies that specialize in growing startups. About two years and many conversations with CVS later, the musician-turned-businessman hit a high note: the drugstore chain would be putting ChopSaver on shelves nationwide.

“I was very emotional and cried like a baby for the better part of an hour. What I’d been dreaming of for about 10 years was finally going to start happening,” says Gosling. “To have that kind of reach and ease for people to find it—it’s a whole new world of opportunity. When you say ‘I’m in CVS,’ that’s a brand people know instantly. It legitimizes the product instantly in the eyes of the consumer.”

ChopSaver Lip Care currently includes two balms, one with SPF 15 and one without. With CVS offering the company a single peg in its lip care section, Gosling selected the sunscreen version.

“It’s a little surreal to see it at CVS. It’s an amazing milestone, for sure. Now you have to figure out a way to make sure the product moves quickly at CVS; they don’t want to see things sit on the shelves,” says Gosling. “But that doesn’t mean I haven’t taken a moment to reflect and say, man, what a journey this has been.”

With his kitchen concoction going head-to-head with the ChapSticks of the world and hopes of eventually expanding the line, Gosling says “now the fun really begins”—a business prospect that’s music to his ears.