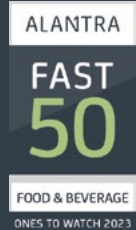


ALANTRA FOOD & BEVERAGE FAST 50

Ones to watch



POLLEN + GRACE

Helping people eat better at Pollen + Grace

When Kristina Komlosiova and Stephanie Kingston worked together at an events company in London, they were surprised by the poor-quality food their colleagues would eat at lunchtime – and struggled with the lack of healthy options available to buy on-the-go. Their answer was to step into the gap in the market: Pollen + Grace, launched in 2015, was the result.



KRISTINA KOMLOSIOVA AND STEPHANIE KINGSTON
FOUNDERS



We worried Covid-19 might be fatal for our business because we mainly targeted workers looking for lunchtime food.

In fact, the pandemic really made people think about their health, including what they were eating, and demand for our products really took off.

KRISTINA KOMLOSIOVA



“Steph would often bring in these amazing, healthy lunches and our colleagues ended up offering her money to make food for them too,” recalls Komlosiova. “We realised there could be a business there – and an opportunity to work in a field that we both felt passionate about.”

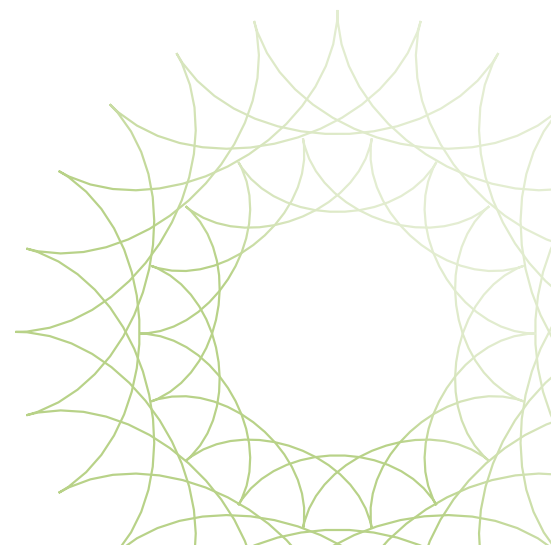
Pollen + Grace started out in Kingston’s kitchen with not much more than a bike and a website to its name. It targeted local workers in Hammersmith, offering a small range of meals made from tasty and healthy ingredients with orders placed before 10am delivered in time for lunch.

“Very quickly, we realised we were on to something,” says Komlosiova. “Local gyms and coffee shops started approaching us to ask whether they could stock us. We posted a lot on Instagram, really exploiting the fact that our products are so visually appealing, and that got us noticed.”

Within less than a year, Pollen + Grace moved to a more professional set-up, hiring kitchen space in an army cadet centre and moving away from the meal delivery business model in favour of distribution through retailers and grocers. Its first deals were with Planet Organic, Selfridges and

Harrods, but Ocado’s decision to start stocking its products in 2018 was a breakthrough.

“Our ultimate goal was to bring nutritious and delicious food to the mass market and the Ocado deal proved there was real demand for our product outside of London,” says Komlosiova. “That was great for us – it really validated everything we had been trying to do for our customers.” A deal followed with Co-op – its first nationwide bricks and mortar stockist – with Tesco then trialling its range in 50 stores in 2020.





We've always seen this as a nationwide brand for everyone, rather than a luxury product.

We're getting closer and closer to realising that vision.

KRISTINA KOMLOSIOVA

Four years later, Pollen + Grace has added Waitrose, Sainsbury's and Whole Foods to its stockists, and the number of stores in which its products are available has risen steadily. Tesco, for example, now sells Pollen + Grace products in over 600 stores across the UK.

"We worried Covid-19 might be fatal for our business, because we mainly targeted workers looking for lunchtime food and they were no longer going to work," says Komlosiova. "In fact, the pandemic really made people think about their health, including what they were eating, and demand for our products really took off."

Today, the company has expanded its range and sells across three product categories: salad bowls, wraps and ready meals. But Pollen + Grace has stayed true to its roots,

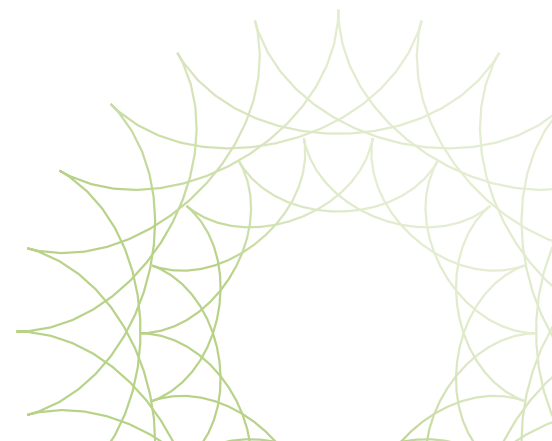
with all its products made from natural ingredients – mostly vegetables, grains and pulses. The company has deliberately avoided meat substitutes, preferring to make a virtue of its plant-based approach; that has played to its advantage amid rising consumer concern about ultra processed foods (UPFs).

Commercial success has followed. Pollen + Grace saw 72% revenue growth in 2022, followed by 57% in 2023. Sales reached £3.9m last year, with Komlosiova hoping that this year's equivalent figure will be around £7m.

Meanwhile, the company continues to explore growth opportunities in new channels beyond grocery, with the aim to make truly delicious and nutritious food available everywhere. The travel sector is

one clear target – Pollen + Grace recently embarked on a big new partnership with British Airways and have two exciting launches with LNER and Eurostar to follow later this year.

"We've always seen this as a nationwide brand for everyone, rather than a luxury product," Komlosiova adds. "We're getting closer and closer to realising that vision."




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Possibility is in the ascent