

New faces the best in the business

Michael Rogers

THE Eastern Suburbs is peppered with them: young, successful businessmen and women who know what they want from life and have done their utmost to achieve it.

But what does it take for someone to turn their big idea into a thriving enterprise that captures the imagination of consumers and, ultimately, turns a tidy profit?

After speaking to four Eastern Suburbs entrepreneurs, we have a clear answer: a healthy penchant for risk.

A desire for world domination doesn't hurt, either.

Green Pages founder Katie Patrick embodies both these seemingly essential qualities.

At 25, she packed in a promising career as an environmental design consultant to launch Australia's first print and online directory of "green" businesses.

"I'm not one who is scared of taking on a challenge," she said. "There's this ridiculous thing I have in my mind - and I'm not sure whether it's some sort of disorder or not - where I don't perceive the risk of things."

Two years later, Ms Patrick's dream is a reality, in the shape of a quarterly publication produced from her Surry Hills office that features more than 5000 businesses and organisations.

"It's probably a lot bigger than what I thought it would be and there were things I was a bit naive about. I didn't think it was going to cost \$300,000 to build a website, for a start," she said.

I'm not doing this because I want to make heaps of money. I'm just doing it because I want to be the best.

— ASM Liquor founder Ben Anderson

It seems a touch of naivete can be helpful for young entrepreneurs.

Take 26-year-old Randwick jewellery designer Samantha Wills, who in five years has turned her eponymous costume jewellery business from a kitchen-table hobby into an international fashion hit.

A recent trip to the US on a fact-finding mission was an eye-opening experience for the Port Macquarie native. "David Jones has 30 stores across the country but chains in America have got 1000 stores," she said.

Ms Wills - who also models when her diary allows it - has found lending her own name to her business to be a worthwhile strategy.

"My friends see stories about someone wearing Samantha Wills and they say, 'Samantha Wills isn't a product, she's my friend'," she said.

"It isn't something that I foresaw, but the positive is that every time your name is mentioned, your brand is mentioned as well."

ASM Liquor founder Ben Anderson followed a similar path by parlaying his passion into a business.

Rather than focusing on a specific niche market or hobby, the Paddington resident admitted his drive came from building a business - any business - by using his marketing nous.

Mr Anderson went solo after completing his university degree, starting up two advertising agencies and eventually selling one, Maverick Communications, in 2002 to fund his liquor venture, best known for its Vodka O brand.

Having established a foothold in the market after five turbulent years, Mr Anderson is now looking towards rapid expansion.

"I'm not doing this because I want to make heaps of money. I'm just doing it because I want to be the best," he said. "I don't know what else I'd do if I wasn't in business; it's all I've ever done."

It's a similar story for Sumo Salad co-founder Luke Baylis, who founded the healthy fast-food chain five years ago with his friend James Miller.

The two former IT professionals recently opened their 60th store, in Bondi Junction, and Mr Baylis said such growth would have been impossible but for their decision to franchise their stores.

"It was a huge step for us. It was our baby - but it became a matter of how we maintained control while allowing the business to grow," the Bondi resident recalled.

"We were originally working 120-hour weeks, doing 18-20 hours some days for about six to eight months. But we're enjoying the work more so now."

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The fantastic four on how to succeed in business

KATIE PATRICK



Who: Founder and CEO, The Green Pages
What: The Green Pages is a print and online directory featuring more than 5000 environmentally-focused businesses and companies.

When: Founded in 2006.

Why: "My vision is for Green Pages to be the nineMSN, the Yellow Pages and the Fairfax Media of the green industry."

Next step: An international presence Ms Patrick says will have to wait until the brand is firmly established in Australia.

BEN ANDERSON



Who: Co-founder and sales director, ASM Liquor
What: Affordably-priced spirits including Vodka O, Tequila Blu and Jinn Dry Gin, which are free of chemical impurities.

When: Founded in 2003.

Why: "To sell a \$70 bottle of booze for \$35. We're the only company taking market share from both the top end and the middle. It's confused the hell out of the liquor industry."

Next step: With a market capitalisation of \$20 million, Mr Anderson is planning rapid expansion. A deal to export the products to 48 countries will underpin his goal of \$100 million in annual turnover.

LUKE BAYLIS



Who: Co-founder, Sumo Salad
What: Healthy alternatives to fast food, including salads, wraps, soups and toasted sandwiches.

When: Founded in 2003

Why: "[Business partner James Miller and I] had both worked in the US and saw some of the trends of greasy food that were starting and we couldn't find any healthy alternatives. With the beautiful produce coming out of Australia, we thought we could make a beautiful salad bar."

Next step: Mr Baylis and Mr Miller are looking to expand their Australian presence by 50 per cent to 90 stores nationally, as well as consolidating their presence in the UK and Dubai and exploring options in other countries.

SAMANTHA WILLS



Who: Founder and designer, Samantha Wills jewellery and accessories

What: A high-end collection of costume jewellery accessories that has adorned the likes of Jennifer Hawkins, Delta Goodrem and Nicole Richie.

When: Founded in 2003.

Why: "I started with school holiday beading classes when I was a little girl. Having no formal training, it's something I can make myself; it's something I really appreciate."

Next step: "World domination," she said. With her US venture on the boil, Ms Wills is now investigating strategies for cracking the boutique fashion houses of Europe.