

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF OPENING A FRANCHISE



Gill and Patrick Weiner

How did one man turn \$7 into a franchise business? Patrick Weiner shares his journey.

In 1994 I stepped off a plane from the UK with \$7 in my pocket and a dream of owning my own business. Almost 19 years later, my wife Gill and I have turned that dream into a reality. We are now the proud owners of a Bedshed franchise in suburban Melbourne.

Before we delve into just how an Englishman turned \$7 into his own business, let me tell you a little about myself.

I'm an optimist. After backpacking around Australia, I was offered a managerial position with a retail company in Melbourne. Following this I spent 10 years with Esanda as a national training consultant.

My wife and I were content with that life, but we weren't happy. The life-changing moment came when I arrived home from one of my many business trips and our daughter didn't recognise me. In that moment, I knew I had to be around my family more.

OWNING MY OWN BUSINESS

I decided to become my own boss and began trading the markets. After several years, my passion for retail resurfaced. As my wife says, when something's a part of you, you're bound to go back to it eventually!

After having been my own boss since 1996 there was absolutely no appeal in working for someone else and we began to investigate business opportunities. After considering various options, we decided a franchise venture would be the best for us.

We spent almost a year researching – we were looking for a national company with a recognised brand, proven systems and an experienced management team. Within 24 hours of contacting Bedshed, the national business development manager, Rod Parker, had responded to my query and organised a coffee catch up with the chief operating officer, Gavin Culmsee and himself.

From that initial meeting I knew Bedshed was the right choice. There was an immediate sense of synergy. Gavin and Rod talked me through the business model and answered every question I threw at them.

That's one of the great things about Bedshed; they offer support every step of the way. We were able to meet with other franchisees and started getting a taste of what was in store for us. The level of support Bedshed provides on a national, regional and local level helped make the transition as smooth as possible.

PROBLEM SOLVING

My wife and I knew we had made the right decision just as we exchanged the formal agreement. Rod Parker commented on how 'remarkably relaxed' I was for someone who had just invested a fair amount of money. However, there was no reason to be nervous. Gavin, Rod and the whole Bedshed team had assisted me with everything from developing a business plan to identifying the location of the store and negotiating a great deal.

The only fear we faced was the potential of changing market forces as we opened up. However,

even though we have been told that it has been a 'tough market' recently, we've got over that hurdle, so our fear has already diminished.

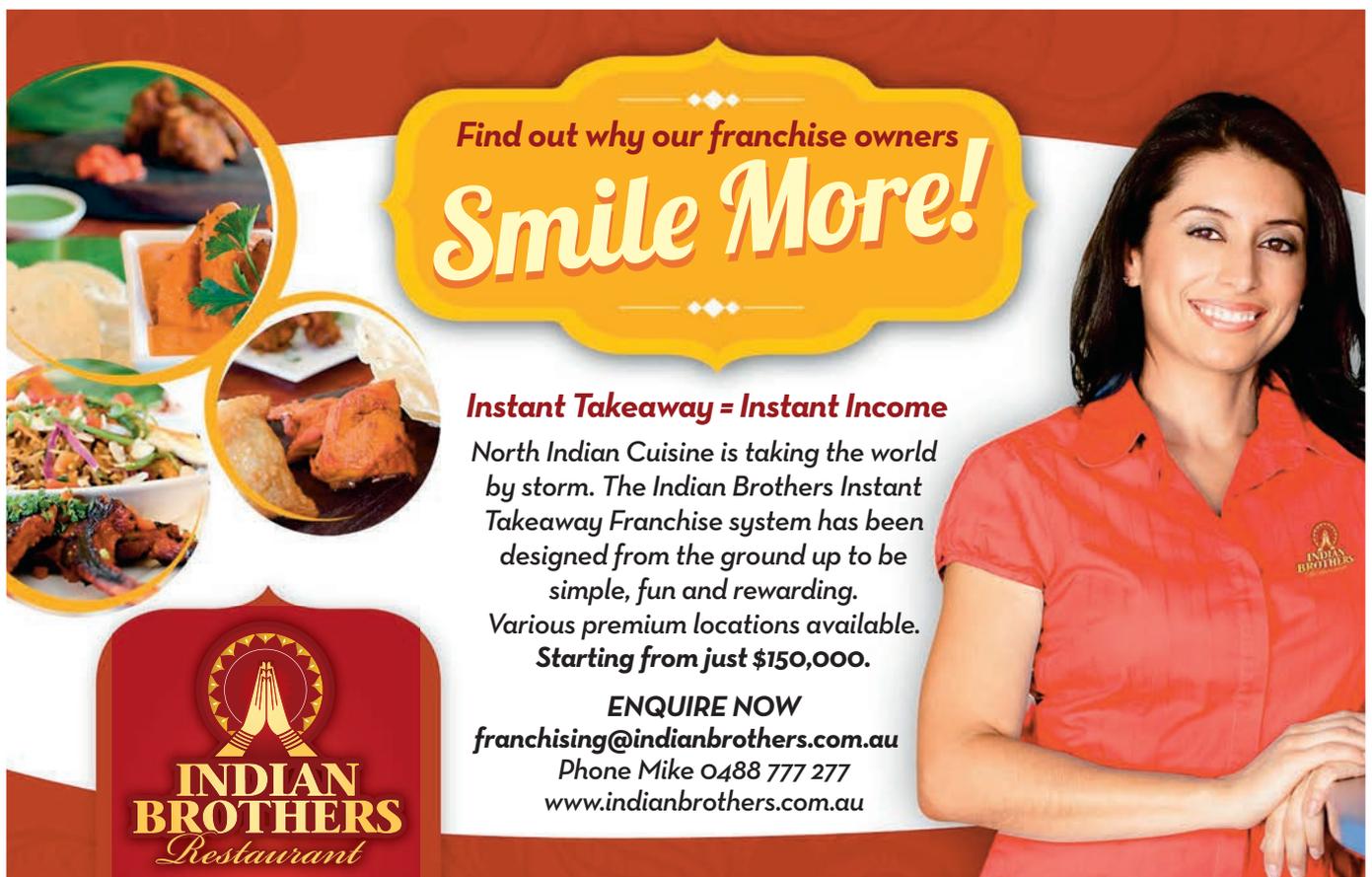
Whilst it was Bedshed's business model that initially attracted us, it was the people that made the transition to franchisee enjoyable and successful – not only the professional staff at Bedshed, but also the franchisees who make up the company's national network," says Patrick.

One of the benefits of franchising over an independent business is you have access to a whole network of people with extensive experience and knowledge and you can tap into this to help make your own business decisions.

When you come up against a problem, 99 percent of the time someone in the network will have experienced it before and can offer advice and assistance.

In the lead-up to opening day, a few pieces of furniture we had ordered had been delayed. My

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wife and I turned to the Bedshed network to seek advice and find a solution to this problem. Within a few short hours, we had managed to buy stock from neighbouring Bedshed stores and have this delivered to Nunawading in time for our soft launch.

SETTING TARGETS

Instead of planning a formal launch, we channelled our budget into marketing and advertising to attract new customers. We wanted to let the community know the store was reopening under new management and a soft launch supported by local marketing was effective in that regard.

My wife and I were definitely nervous in the lead up to opening day. Would we meet our sales targets? We had high expectations for the store and had poured significant time and energy into making sure it worked. Looking back, I actually think the nerves helped, because the adrenaline spurred us on and kept us going through a very busy period.

As it turned out, we had nothing to be concerned about. During the first few weeks of being open, the store attracted many customers, all of whom were supportive of Gill and I and the store.

Bedshed had encouraged us to set weekly sales targets which we did with their guidance. We found this to be extremely beneficial, as it helped put our monthly target into perspective and gave us a frequent check-in point to see how things were tracking and make changes if we weren't satisfied.

A FLEXIBLE SYSTEM

Before deciding to buy a franchise, we wondered whether the structure would be too rigid to allow us to experiment with our business, and it's great that has not been the case with Bedshed.

For example, we decided to use a customer-based selling model, which involves truly connecting with customers and sharing the benefits of various products with them, rather than simply listing the features. The Victorian retail manager, Marwan Zeitoune was aware of my background and encouraged us to pursue this method of selling. So far the technique has worked well for us.

We wanted to offer our customers something different. From day one, we decided to show our appreciation to our customers by gifting them with a jar of Yarra Valley Strawberry Jam regardless of the value of their purchase.

In addition to this, we rented our own Bedshed van to extend our customer service experience and have control of our delivery process. This allows the last point of contact with our customers to be a Bedshed Nunawading employee who espouses the same core customer service values as us. We are very proud of the feedback we regularly receive from customers about our delivery team and the friendly but efficient service they provide. We want every customer to have a unique and fulfilling experience when they shop with us.

We've been thrilled with the volume and value of sales in the initial months and genuinely believe we can continue to replicate this success and generate a significant return on investment. Bedshed has been a committed partner in the success of our store from the start. The support of the other franchisees and the professional staff at head office has been phenomenal.

A few months ago, my wife and I would have never expected to be able to have even a little time for ourselves, but here we are. It's a wonderful feeling knowing we can go in to work; make decisions on how the store should be run and still have the time and flexibility to achieve the lifestyle we were looking for. As the business matures, I have no doubt we'll have more and more time for ourselves but our unfaltering commitment to ensure continued growth means that we are very much hands-on franchisees. **F**

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