

## Doing business in style

AFTER 18 years as a talented clothing designer, Patti Ainalis decided to fashion a new business. After seeking help to take it to the next level, she found the perfect fit in Fay Jamieson, one of the SBMS Experienced Business Mentors

An experienced fashion designer, Patti decided to move into corporate female suiting. Her unique and fresh corporate apparel designs have a sharp edge and are manufactured locally with a fast turnaround and the flexibility to manufacture offshore.

Patti's knowledge of her customers and their fashion needs is extensive, and she has a natural understanding of the style and comfort needs of today's business women. She also knows the fashion inside out after learning from one of Australia's top designers and starting her first business, Patti Constas, cutting and making garments for individuals from home in Yarraville.

PC Corporate designs and manufactures corporate uniforms and provides stylish business wardrobes for individuals. No order is too big or too small, and the unique cutting edge designs look fantastic on all sizes from 4-24. Garments are made of quality materials and can be embroidered.



PC Corporate customers include 4-6 star hotels, casinos, food handling companies, Tabarets, clubs and anyone in the hospitality industry in Victoria and interstate. It was recently engaged to outfit staff at the new Hilton South Wharf in Melbourne's Docklands.

On a mission to prove that uniforms don't have to be bland, Patti was excited when some Hilton staff told they would wear their outfits after work. It was the ultimate compliment and proved she was on the right track. "People have this vision that uniform is boring ... but it can be really stylish," she says.

Patti was reasonably confident about her new venture, but wanted to take it to the next level. She discovered the SBMS after her husband Frank told her about its website and was matched with

Fay Jamieson, an experienced clothing industry business operator whose expertise dovetailed perfectly. Fay has extensive experience in the fashion industry and rebuilt 69-year-old Australian corporate wardrobe business, Coronet-Fashion at Work, into a market leader in just a few years.

The SBMS is a non-government, non-profit organisation of volunteer expert mentors who give their time and experience to help small business. It is supported by Small Business Victoria, which refers clients to it.

Patti saw Fay for 10 sessions under the Business Acceleration Program, and they have maintained contact since.

Fay provided guidance on expanding the business into corporate apparel, and offered strategies and marketing advice on the hospitality uniform sector of the corporate apparel industry. She guided Patti through requirements for employees to help take the business forward, and helped with the processes to set up the required structure.



Fay says the business is “in the growth phase” and its premises have expanded to cope with the next stage. Among other things, she also ensured Patti was able to:

- Look at the progression of the business, the budgets required to get there and lead times.
- Surround herself with key staff with the experience to help growth, and expertise in areas that she did not have it.
- Quickly organise in-house design, graphics and experienced staff.
- Employ five extra staff since PC Corporate was launched.
- Secure a government grant for a computer cad machine to help with patterns and design.

Frank, who is involved in the fashion industry through his freight transport business, also worked with Fay to help Patti work on her budgets and financials.

After seeing Fay PC Corporate’s turnover increased by 150 per cent in less than a calendar year, and the number of customers and inquiries doubled. Profitability, sales and staff have all increased and skills, processes, financial planning and budgeting have all improved. Patti now has seven staff, six of them part-time, and has been able to re-invest in the growth of the business.

Patti cannot speak highly enough of Fay. Without her mentor, she says she would not have expanded into the corporate apparel business or be on target for 250 per cent growth in the next financial year. Patti is absolutely thrilled with the time and dedication Fay showed her.

“She’s like God’s gift to me,” Patti says. “She’s been through it and done it and been there. Whatever she does it’s with a passion. Fay has made me look outside the square. She has opened up a whole new world for me. Fay has given me the opportunity of a lifetime to help me get off the tools (sewing machine) and working in the business and to concentrate on growth and direction of the business.”

Fay says Patti is talented, keen and has all the ingredients to succeed in a highly competitive industry. She says Patti has identified a gap in the corporate market and is working hard to fill it, but wisely not moving too fast. “She’s putting people on slowly,” Fay says. “It’s a fantastic business; it has massive potential. It will be a great business and it’s certainly on a very quick rise.”

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