

Showing signs of success

CHANCES are Bendigo residents have seen the fruits of this business's labour scooting around local streets. And thanks to the Small Business Mentoring Service, they are likely to see even more of its nifty mobile billboards very soon.

Paul Towers and Lynley Nicholas started Customised Mobile Scooter Signs in 2008, hoping to use their love of two-wheel vehicles to become their own boss.

The innovative company now helps local businesses spread the word and boost their own bottom line. It tows framed billboards with scooters, allowing clients to cover almost every part of Bendigo and its surrounds.



Before starting their business Paul had worked in several jobs, including as a labourer, and Lynley had been a veterinary nurse, motorcycle courier, motorcycle rider trainer and accountant. Both loved scooters and motorbikes and decided to use that passion to make their living.

Customised Mobile Scooter Signs sells advertising space on A frame billboards towed by scooters. Clients are both corporate and retail, and it is the only local scooter advertiser in the area. "We believed quite strongly there was a market for this type of medium in Bendigo," Paul and Lynley say. "We both have all necessary licensing qualifications.

"Our service entails scooters towing trailers fitted with 1200mm x 1500mm advertising billboards throughout Bendigo CBD and surrounding suburbs. Our mission is to be seen as the most innovative, enthusiastic and valuable media supplier to both clients and advertising agencies who are looking to enhance their media plans with effective but non traditional media opportunities."

While the idea was novel and had great potential, Paul and Lynley had no real business experience so were starting from scratch. As a start-up company, they needed to know more about advertising and valuing their product. They also needed to better understand what the company really was and how to manage it.

After hearing about the SBMS through Continuing Education Bendigo, which offers adult, community and further education, Lynley and Paul were matched with mentor Blake Escudier Ph.D.

Blake has 20 years experience as an employee, contractor, partner and business owner in the US and Australia. He is principal owner and director of counselling services for Entrepanalysis, and has helped more than 500 small business owners.

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.

Lynley and Paul saw Blake under the Business Acceleration Program, and may continue as needed. The SBMS knowledge base is large enough to provide clients with specific needs. As part of the program, Lynley and Paul worked with Blake for three sessions on business strategy, marketing and product development. To provide specific mentoring for budgeting and accounting controls they had a session with Mi Thian-DeWind, a specialist in business financial systems.

Among other things Blake and Mi helped them to:

- Develop an overview of business planning, with priority on product development and a marketing plan.
- Review the advertising industry product descriptions and terms.
- Produce a target market strategy.
- Discuss sales presentation strategy and tactics.
- Discuss product pricing and valuation.
- Review cash flow statements, projections and budgeting formats.

Blake was extremely impressed by Lynley and Paul's enthusiasm. They believed in what they were doing and were dedicated to the many tasks needed to successfully set their business up.

After seeing Blake, they became confident that they had a valuable and potentially profitable product.

"They also accepted that they didn't know advertising and approached the mentoring sessions as a wonderful learning tool," Blake said.



Since seeing Blake profitability has increased, and new customers and inquiries have both jumped by 50 per cent. The company now has a product that works with the advertising industry, and can compete as a communication medium within the Bendigo market.

Blake said while all start-up businesses wanted more income, Lynley and Paul were very satisfied with their progress and understood that to achieve that income they needed to boost their sales activity.

“The company is not opposed to growth and intends to contact the SBMS when strategic planning is required for that growth,” he said.

For Lynley and Paul it’s full steam ahead. They are keen to continue offering a guaranteed service delivering creative media solutions and providing clients with unique advertising opportunities. Their billboards certainly provide the WOW factor and help their campaigns to stand out.

“We found the service invaluable,” they say of the SBMS. “We now know how important management skills are. Blake has given us a more clear direction of how to structure our business. Without his help we would be running around in circles.”

Lynley adds: “I’d really like to emphasis how great Blake was. I picked him out of the list, because his experience was *so vast* and so suitable. He drive up to Bendigo twice, spent hours with us even though his schedule includes lecturing overseas all the time. His knowledge on all relevant business topics was endless; he has won all sorts of awards overseas. We cannot speak highly enough of Blake. Mi was also so lovely and very knowledgeable in her field.”

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