

# KOOKY ABOUT DESIGN, MANUFACTURING QUALITY AND SERVICE

BY GRANT WOOLLIAMS

'Made in China' are the ubiquitous words on most clothing labels, and the majority of the other consumer durables we buy.

So, do you have to be kooky to make clothing in New Zealand and sell it through your own retail outlets? Apparently it helps.

The MYOB Awesome Service Awards became interested in Kooky New Zealand Designer Fashion when one of its Whangarei staff was nominated for, and subsequently won, an award for inspirational customer service.

MYOB Awesome Service Award nominations go through a due diligence process and where a nominee is an employee we take an interest in the company that employs them. The reason for this is simple: the delivery of inspirational customer service by staff isn't accidental. It typically flows from the signals (and training) they get from management.

But Kooky sales assistant Lorraine Young's award win also highlighted the fact that she works for an unusual business in this day and age. Kooky is 100% New Zealand owned, designs all its clothing, manufactures its entire special occasions range in New Zealand and sells it through its own stores (of which there are 15 around the country employing 42 people).

Kooky has a factory and head office employing a further 19 full-time staff in Wanganui.

We asked joint owner, and Kooky's head designer, Suzanne Lee Sowry, about the pros and cons of manufacturing clothing in New Zealand versus China?

"We manufacture our entire special occasion range in New Zealand and have our casual and corporate ranges manufactured in China using our own designs.

"The advantage of manufacturing in New Zealand includes the design team

being able to oversee the entire production everyday. The design team is able to tweak and perfect each process with ease. The garments made in China require their specifications to be 100% accurate which involves a lot more work for the designers.

"The pros also include the fact that some of the Kooky machinists based in Wanganui have been with Kooky for up to 20 years. These women, therefore, know our standards and techniques exceptionally well and are able to train new staff with ease.

"Another big pro with having our own New Zealand-based factory is that we can do a quick turn around of a particular style if the market demands it. If we relied only on off-shore manufacturing the lead time is much longer. Obviously by the time goods arrive the demand might no longer exist, and the opportunity is lost. This often happens so it provides Kooky with a huge advantage.

"The cons (of New Zealand-based manufacturing) include the higher costs, especially wages."

## HOW DIFFICULT IS IT TO OPERATE A CHAIN LIKE THIS IN COMPETITION WITH MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES?

"It can be difficult in terms of price, but so long as we maintain superior design and quality, and educate our customers to these attributes, then they accept a slightly higher price.

"Kooky's advantage against multinational companies is that we know our New Zealand market intimately and we can easily and quickly judge the demands of the customers and meet their needs, as opposed to accepting more generic designs that multinationals are forced to produce for cross-market appeal.

## WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS YOU HAVE LEARNT THROUGH OWNING AND MANAGING KOOKY?

"You must have a superior product. No amount of marketing or customer service can make up for an inferior product. You may

make a sale through clever marketing and selling but that will be the only item you sell to that customer once they realise it is not up to scratch."

## WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR KOOKY OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS?

"We are opening a wholesale division to service both New Zealand and Australia, and plans are also in place to open our own stores in Australia."

## HOW DO YOU INSTILL A STRONG CUSTOMER SERVICE ETHIC AMONG YOUR STAFF?

"We have very strong policies on how we like our customers to be treated.

"Our Area Managers undergo ongoing training which they pass on to Store Managers and staff alike.

"Quite simply, good service sells. The easiest way to meet key performance indicators is for all staff to have exemplary service standards set for them, and we rigidly enforce these standards."

## ANY COMMENTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO MAKE ABOUT THE MYOB AWESOME SERVICE AWARDS?

"It's a wonderful award for someone passionate about what they do to receive. It's one thing to get pats on the back from your boss. But when you genuinely love and strive to enhance your customers' lives with great service and product, it's a wonderful feeling to get direct feedback and thanks from them."

\* GRANT WOOLLIAMS ASSISTS IN RUNNING THE MYOB AWESOME SERVICE AWARDS WHICH REWARD INDIVIDUALS FOR PROVIDING GREAT CUSTOMER/CLIENT SERVICE. TO REWARD SOMEONE WHO HAS GIVEN YOU INSPIRATIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE GO TO [WWW.AWESOMESERVICE.CO.NZ](http://WWW.AWESOMESERVICE.CO.NZ)

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