

Franchise guru visits his Australian outlets

ENTREPRENEUR and franchising guru Rik Hellewell (pictured) is in the midst of a visit to Australia from the UK to catch up with some of his Ovenu franchisees.



Over the past three decades franchising has grown into an industry worth \$80 billion a year, generating about 14% of Gross Domestic Product across the UK.

Mr Hellewell founded Ovenu, an environmentally friendly oven cleaning business, in 1994.

The business attracts more than 50,000 customers a year across the United Kingdom alone and there are a number of franchises on the Sunshine Coast.

The franchise model has been replicated in the US, France, Spain and New Zealand.

"As the well-known Yorkshire expression states, 'I play with a straight bat'," Mr Hellewell, who was raised in Yorkshire, said.

"I tend to operate with a massive acknowledgement of the faculties we are born with: two ears for listening out for information, two arms for learning practical skills, two eyes for seeing the way forwards, two nostrils for smelling success, two legs to walk towards the pot of gold and one mouth for power and provocation in the correct proportion with the all of the above."

Mr Hellewell said the reason

for his success was the ability to see the potential for his business to become a franchise.

"I knew there was a market for professional oven valeting, not just in the UK but around the world, and taking the plunge to make my company a franchise was really just the start for me," he said.

"I use the internet to measure how we are doing and the site has seen traffic more than double since the same period in 2006. In the last three months alone we have had over 40,000 web visits and in excess of 10,000 phone calls."

Oven valeting, much like car valeting, involves actually dismantling the oven and cleaning the individual components. The average service takes up to two hours and costs \$130.

Under the Ovenu system, franchisees are charged a fixed ongoing fee, rather than one based on a percentage of profits or sales.

Tourism winners' secrets of success

AFFORDABILITY and not forgetting the locals are among the secrets to succeeding as a tourist attraction on the Sunshine Coast.

That's according to two people who should know: the winners of the tourism category in the 2009 Excellence in Business Awards.

Sunshine Castle owner Birte Benecke-Uhrig described the award win as awesome.

"We are so unique in Australia, let alone on the Sunshine Coast," she said.

"I've got fantastic staff who provide great service, we always go that extra mile and we've been very lucky that in times of recession we are still doing well.

"We are very family friendly, and we are very well priced. Plus we are a great wet weather option as 90% of the castle is undercover."

The business, which celebrates its fourth anniversary next May, has two permanent and six casual staff.

Ms Benecke-Uhrig said the business had adopted a slow and steady approach to growth.

"We never took out huge debts, and every time we had a bit of money leftover we put it back to improve things and that stood us in good stead," she said.

"We have worked hard over the last three years to attract more events, put in a commercial kitch-



CELEBRATION: Sunshine Castle owners Stephan Uhrig and Birte Benecke-Uhrig outside their award-winning attraction.

PHOTO: MICHAELA GLEN/165519

en and get a liquor licence."

The Twin Waters Golf Club won the large tourism business award for the third time, backing up prizes from 2006 and 2008.

The 19-year-old business has 50 staff in the club, restaurant, bar and maintenance areas.

"Player numbers did drop for a few months," marketing manager Maxine Meiklejohn said.

"But we kept an eye on the figures and took the right action to support that area over that time and the last few months have been fantastic with very high player

numbers, so we've certainly recovered.

"We had to monitor our staffing levels and costs to make sure we kept that on top of that."

She said locals were just as important as the tourists to the business.

"We have a strong member base. It's very important that we support the local community and look after the needs of locals.

"We get a lot of the resort and interstate trade, but like all businesses, we rely on that local trade."

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