

# Growing a business with a business mentor

**BECOMING THE** owner of a thriving business is the fantasy of many hard-working New Zealand employees. However, the dream, once achieved, does not always live up to expectations. Numerous new business owners, although skilled in some areas, find that they have gaps of knowledge when it comes to things such as marketing or exporting, which makes moving the business forward a difficult task. Other owner-operators become overly caught up in the day-to-day running of the company, leaving no time for business planning.

Ray Schofield, chief executive of Business Mentors New Zealand, believes that mentoring, especially for owners who have gone into business without any formal qualifications, is the answer.

"Speaking to an experienced mentor can give business owners a vital boost of knowledge, enabling them to progress with their business and ensure that it runs more efficiently and productively," Schofield explains. "It can give them a chance to take a step back and pinpoint what is working and what is not."

"Having a mentor is like having a de facto board," he adds. "You have a person to speak with, who is not involved in the operation, to act as a guide and sounding board. This is a huge advantage for the novice entrepreneur."

The country's only national volunteer mentoring service, Business Mentors New Zealand, has over 1500 knowledgeable

mentors around New Zealand, all of whom are willing to share their skills and expertise with owners of small to medium businesses.

Lemon Z limoncello is one example of a Kiwi business that has benefited from business mentoring. Lemon Z limoncello is a lemon liqueur created by James Grigg using the premium Yen Ben lemons found in the Bay of Islands. It has won an array of international awards and is the number-one selling limoncello in both New Zealand and Australia.

Although Grigg had enjoyed huge local success with the limoncello product, he lacked exporting experience. When the time came to venture across the Tasman, he was wary of taking the plunge alone.

"Exporting is far more complicated than one might think," he says. "Every detail in a contract needs to be right or it could cause a future disaster. I wanted a mentor who could help me ensure I reached agreements that would not cause problems down the line."

After contacting the not-for-profit mentoring organisation, Business Mentors New Zealand, Grigg was paired with export guru Jack Talbot.

"It is incredible being able to get advice from someone like Jack; he is the perfect fit for my business," says Grigg. "He worked for Lion Nathan for years, so he knows a huge amount about exporting in the alcohol industry. He continually provides me with



James Grigg, managing director of Lemon Z

the knowledge and documentation I need to make well-informed decisions."

Griggs' next step will be to launch Lemon Z into the larger markets of China and the United States, where he hopes to achieve the same success he has enjoyed at home. He has recently made his first foray into China with the first pallet of Lemon Z being dispatched to Beijing in early February.

"This is an intimidating time," he says. "I am just a small fish about to enter a very big ocean; but it's good to know I've got someone beside me who has swum in it before."

Talbot, who has been part of the Business Mentors team for a year, finds mentoring intrinsically rewarding: "When someone acts on the advice I give them and is successful it's a fantastic feeling. I think mentoring allows me to use my skills to do a bit of good."

"It is a great organisation. I see many small business owners who need help but don't have the contacts or the resources to get someone in," he adds. "It is extremely beneficial to have a free service that connects small, relatively inexperienced business owners to people who can help them."

"In my experience, small business owners appear to lack confidence and direction. We aim to give them a bit of reassurance and set them on a clear, sustainable path."

Griggs has found this sense of direction extremely valuable:

"With Jack's help I have developed a five-year plan. At first I was sceptical about putting unrealistic goals on paper, but I came to realise achieving them is irrelevant. It is about having a purpose. I now know where I am going, which makes any decisions or issues I encounter seem more manageable." **BT**

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