



*There are many factors that influence the growth and success of a business. One of the most important is determination. Without the will to succeed, many business owners find it hard to deal with the many obstacles that litter the road to success. For the team at Signs'n'Banners in Victoria, that 'True Grit' spirit has seen a hobby grown into a vibrant business that's firing with all guns blazing.*

**PARTNERS** Stacey and David are the duo behind Signs'n'Banners. For David, creating signage was really a backyard business/ weekend hobby. Already friends, Stacey approached David with the idea of turning Signs'n'Banners into a fully functioning, successful signage shop. The two agreed. "As this was just a newly established business I was excited about the challenge. I started being involved in the business in February 2007", Stacey said. "By September 2007, Signs'n'Banners was a 'Business Achiever' 2007 finalist in our local paper."

David's background is in mechanical engineering. However, he later went on to study marketing, real estate and quality control. Before Signs'n'Banners, David's work experience included a diverse range of fields such as quality control, sales of capital equipment and printed goods, and working in the field of real estate.

For Stacey, the road that led to Signs'n'Banners' has been an incredibly hard but inspiring one. Stacey has lived life without her mum, was abused at age nine, fell pregnant at age fifteen, had a second child at age nineteen, and at one point when her son was three and her daughter was four months old, was homeless and sleeping on floors. For Stacey, the hard years continued as she suffered a life of domestic violence. "Now you may be thinking this is a sad and sorry story, however these are my lessons I have learnt in life that are now my gifts to give and share with others", said Stacey. "I discovered my higher purpose in life and that is to help other young mums gain back their self-esteem, discover their passions in life and to take action to achieve them."

Stacey attended school throughout her third pregnancy, even taking her son to school with

# TRUE GRIT – SIGNS'N'BANNERS

her. She went on to work part-time as a waitress and complete the Certificate II Business Secretary at TAFE. The next step was to go door knocking to find an employer who would give her a job and help her to complete a traineeship and learn every aspect of business administration. Stacey eventually found and worked full-time as an accountant's assistant as well as complete Certificate II, III and IV Business Administration/Management. Whilst completing these certificates she was nominated for the 'Optus Outstanding Student' of the year by Australian Industry Group Training - a great achievement for a single young mum with three children.

From the backyard to the factory floor, Signs'n'Banners now produces digitally printed marketing solutions for a variety of business groups including government, advertising agencies, retail and trade customers and exhibition events. The company's range of products includes pull-up banners, x-banners, bowhead flags, teardrop flags, posters, portable fabric walls and a range of other digitally printed products.

In addition to David and Stacey, the company has two other staff including Tom who has the role of digital printer/customer service and Jitka who is employed to sew and finish the banners.

For David and Stacey, the most difficult aspect of operating a sign business has been finding the right employee. "We are energetic and full of enthusiasm with very positive attitudes", said Stacey. "We only want a team made up of the right people. We look for people that are ambitious, self-motivated and passionate. We maintain this in our work environment because David and I have these same qualities. It's hard for our team not to pick up on our energy. We want team players and a team that can all work together. This industry can be quiet one day and then very busy the next; it is hard to find self-motivated employees for the quiet times. We are currently looking for a digital printing course for our employee and have struggled to find one.

There are courses for screenprinting, however we want to find a digital printing course. This means Dave has to train our new employees which takes a few weeks away from other important tasks."

"Having to wait for our suppliers is another difficult aspect to deal with. We like to provide top customer service and we like to quote our customers within the day. Sometimes we are waiting for days for a quote from our suppliers. This has an effect on the outcome of our customer service given to our client.

"One major challenge we had to be overcome was gaining knowledge of how to manufacture the goods we sell, and that was conquered with constant help of our suppliers and many contacts within the industry. In addition, we only had a small office with a small printer and very limited funds. So when we had orders for large banners we had to outsource our jobs. We also had no sewing machine to finish (stitch) the banners off, so again we had to outsource the finishing (stitching) of our banners. This obstacle meant we could not have control over the quality of our printing work or the control of the time frame in which our customers received their finished goods. This was frustrating because we wanted to have a reputation for producing great quality printing in a fast, efficient time frame."

## DAVID AND STACEY HAD THREE MAJOR GOALS TO ACHIEVE IN 2007

- Move to a larger premises
- Purchase a larger digital printer
- Purchase an in-house industrial sewing machine.

"We set about putting all of our profits straight back into the business and in July 2007 we found a larger factory and moved in. In September 2007 we purchased a new wide-format printer, and in February 2008 we purchased an industrial sewing machine specifically designed to sew large vinyl banners. After overcoming these three major

challenges, we have gained much more work from companies who require repeat printing jobs with great quality printing and fast turn-around. We are slowly gaining the reputation we so desire."

### WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST CHALLENGING SIGNAGE THE COMPANY HAS HAD TO CREATE?

"We were in a tiny office that was only 40sqm and we won a job with Autopro to print these huge banners and polypropylene and core flute signs. We only had a small timeframe to complete this project and so we had to pull the door off the hinges in the office to allow the signs to be laminated, as there was absolutely no space to do these size signs. We worked until very late at night to complete this project, however we managed to have it complete and looking brilliant by the due date. This is when we knew we needed to move to a larger premise. We have such a laugh about this now."

### WHAT IS THE BEST ASPECT OF OPERATING A SIGN BUSINESS?

"Being able to live our passion. Dave and I bring such different skills into the business and I believe this is why we are successful. We are so very passionate about business, we get excited every day and are extremely independent and self driven. Dave's personal skills are that he is so driven and can see and feel where the business is heading.

Once he has an idea he does not procrastinate and gets the job done. Dave knows everything about the finances in the business, he is a great genuine sales person. He knows everything about the manufacturing of the banners and has even learnt how to use the sewing machine."

"I love dealing and talking with people. I know one of my biggest strengths is delivering great customer service. Having worked within the funeral industry I have an understanding of people from all walks of life and, I have also accounting skills. My sales skills come from just being me; I have never done any sales courses and believe my genuine nature is what makes me a success. I love marketing and writing our monthly newsletter. I have a real desire to make a difference in many people's lives."

### WHAT ARE THE COMPANY'S PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

"Our business has had a great success not only within our local area but also with our many interstate customers. Our vision of the business not only lays in the methods of how we manufacture, but more importantly how we would like our business to be and how we sell our products to

our customers. Thus we see our potential on how we market our business to our customers and how we interact with our customers, rather than the type and method of making our products."

"We don't want our business to be a one day wonder, but a solid business model that can offer our employees and partners solid futures, where those that are part of Signs'n'Banners are makers of the business of the future rather than current employees. We like to think of ourselves already as role models in the industry by the fact that we are very genuine and loyal to our customers and also do great quality printing. We are very honest from the beginning of the ordering of the banners to the end of the finished product with our customers. We pride ourselves in that we set our goals out every six months and as we tick them off our business growth continues each time. We are always looking at how we can grow the business and how we can benefit our customers." 

➔ If you would like to tell the industry about your sign business, get in contact with our editor at E: [editor@visa.org.au](mailto:editor@visa.org.au)



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