

Lessons Learnt

For 64-year-old Alan Manly, educating up-and-comers in Australian business means retirement is definitely not an option.



What's the name of your company?

Group Colleges Australia Pty Ltd.

What does your company do?

We are an education institution offering students certificates, diplomas and degrees in accounting and business plus recently an MBA.

How long have you been in business?

We started 1988, so we've been in operation for 26 years.

What were you doing before you started this business?

I was trained as a computer engineer, later moving into marketing of services.

How did the idea for your business come about?

A great opportunity presented itself to manage a computer programming school. I then noticed an opportunity to educate overseas students. I was in the right place at the right time for the boom in that business. I have travelled the world promoting education in the best country in the world. Education is now the largest services export for Australia.

What has been the most difficult challenge you've had to overcome?

On top of the usual challenges of small business and later a medium size business, I spent more than ten years distracted from my business goals by being tied up in court thanks to a vexatious litigant and a very accommodating legal system. The experience taught me to be bold enough to sack lawyers and represent myself in court. That decision resulted in 250 appearances in court, 30 plus cases with my associate and I winning all the cases. I then published a book titled *When there are too many lawyers..., there is no Justice!* The reviews have been amazing. People love reading about a very ordinary person taking on the system... and winning.

What has been the most effective form of advertising for your business?

A well-presented web site supported

Alan Manly



by hard copy brochures. I should add that developing personal relationships underlies everything you do personally and in business.

How important is social media to your business?

All media is important. The death of print media may be prematurely trumpeted. The super growth of social media heralds both its arrival and permanent change. We have tried not having hard copy brochures and failed. We tried all social media and failed. Just like the paperless office... nothing is absolute. We are now more social media than any other media. No one predicted that a few years ago.

What do you think the Federal or State Government could do to help make it easier for small business?

A small amount of self-interest springs to mind here. Training folks on how to set

up a business could address the dreaded statistics showing a high failure rate of start-ups. The number of businesses that fail with really good people involved is always upsetting. Funding basic training for people wishing to commence a business would be a benefit for governments and the people. Electing people who have run a business instead of "too many lawyers" might be a good idea!

What are your plans to expand the business?

We now have the full pathway of courses from diploma to MBA. The next step is online courses and then opening campuses in Melbourne and Brisbane.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Be bold enough to demand what you want from yourself and others. Read really interesting books by nice folks like me! ☑