

Simple stepping stones to starting your own successful business

PAUL Jameson's wry laugh allows him just enough time to collect his thoughts. It's a laugh I've provoked by asking him to suggest 10 simple steps to starting a business.

"That's a lot of steps," he says. Nurturing local entrepreneurs to recognise opportunity where others see chaos or confusion is Paul's area of expertise. As manager of Business Incubation at NORTEC, a not-for-profit employment and training organisation, he has worked with a vast and continually growing number of local innovators.

"Let me say first that I believe a lot of businesses are about networking," Paul says in response to the question. "I think it is very important that these businesses build networks. That is one of the most effective things they can do."

Training and education is vital as well, Paul says. "They need to become experts in all the various technical areas that are required for their business - including business skills. People who are new to business and coming into an area they don't understand or have had no training in are faced with becoming functionally competent. In this environment, people are fearful about being able to cope.

One example many of us would be familiar with is bookkeeping. Says Paul: "Nobody innately knows how to bookkeep and yet once you've been doing it for a while it is a very simple process. People do have a lot of fear about this sort of thing. Having the persistence, the courage and the willingness to take risks is a big part of starting up a small business. So too is planning the business. We know that businesses that have business plans succeed much more often than those that don't."

For sixteen years NORTEC has been operating business incubation programs in the Northern Rivers region. As one of the early adopters of the program in Australia, NORTEC has earned a high reputation among incubator associations worldwide.

The objective of the program is to create wealth in the community through small business success stories and to generally foster small business. Rotating every three years, the incubators are seen as a sensible pathway to successful businesses and to help early stage businesses gain traction.

"We provide small flexible spaces that are easy in and easy out; that is, we don't ask people to sign a three-year lease or even a one-year lease," Paul explains. "We move them in under an agreement that gives them a license to use the premises. They can move out with just two weeks' notice. We also don't charge outgoings and we don't charge bonds. We do as much as we can to reduce start-up costs. Capital is one of the problems that start-up businesses have."

Businesses are also given anything up to a three-year tenancy in one of the business incubators.

"Towards the end of that tenancy we expect them to move out into normal commercial premises. By that time, businesses should be able to withstand that," says Paul. "In

those three years we try to help them grow their business by providing business advice, training, networking opportunities and support in various areas of their business. We also provide workspaces that are flexible, so they can grow within the business incubator."

Next year a fourth business incubator in Goonellabah will join the existing three from Ballina, Byron Bay and Mullumbimby.

"Each of the incubators tends to be themed," explains Paul. "For example, Mullumbimby we term a 'knowledge-based' industry, so we wouldn't expect a manufacturer to

go in there. Whereas in Byron Bay, it is more an arts and crafts facility and we wouldn't expect a knowledge-based industry to go in there. For Goonellabah, we believe it will be what we call a 'general purpose incubator' which would mean we would expect to have a mixture of small manufacturing and service industries."

6 The first step is to want to do it

In the Mullumbimby Incubator, Rainforest Rescue is what Paul calls: "A social enterprise. They buy land in the Daintree, land in Ecuador, they support environmental programs in several parts of the world. They have planted well over 100,000 trees locally here, all without government support. When they first moved into our centre,

they had one person and they were sharing a workspace. They are now up to three workspaces and have five full-time employees in our area."

Also in Mullumbimby is the eight-month-old web-based business, Bare Naked Beauty. Selling Australian-made, all-natural skin-care products online, this local business is one of the incubators success stories.

"Do they all grow like that? No, of course they don't," says Paul. "But some of them do."

Georgie Ward and husband Chris have only been in Australia for 16 months. Yet in this relatively short amount of time, the dynamic duo has set up their first Australian business. The Little Art Shop on Main Street in Alstonville opened its doors in December 2008, selling a diverse range of quality art and craft supplies. For Georgie, it seemed a natural thing to do.

"I didn't really know what course I wanted to go when we came here to Australia from the UK. I've always worked in the arts industry whether it be in galleries or picture framing or working in retail shops. It seemed a really natural thing for me to want to do and the opportunity was here in a new country. For once in our life we had the money to have a go at something like this without help from people. So we thought yes, let's see how it goes."

"Having a go" is proving successful for the Wards. The Little Art Shop has adapted well to its location and to the local community of Alstonville. Georgie and Chris have recently expanded their business to

include picture framing and they have also used their large premises to conduct art and craft courses.

"The courses are something that we wanted to have because we have a beautiful hall at the back of The Little Art Shop. We now have one teacher who conducts children's art classes on weekends and drawing and watercolour classes during the week. We work really well together."

I ask this enterprising woman for 10 simple steps to building a business. The matter-of-fact answer from Georgie is succinct.

"Ten simple steps will probably take you to 10 very difficult decisions," she says.

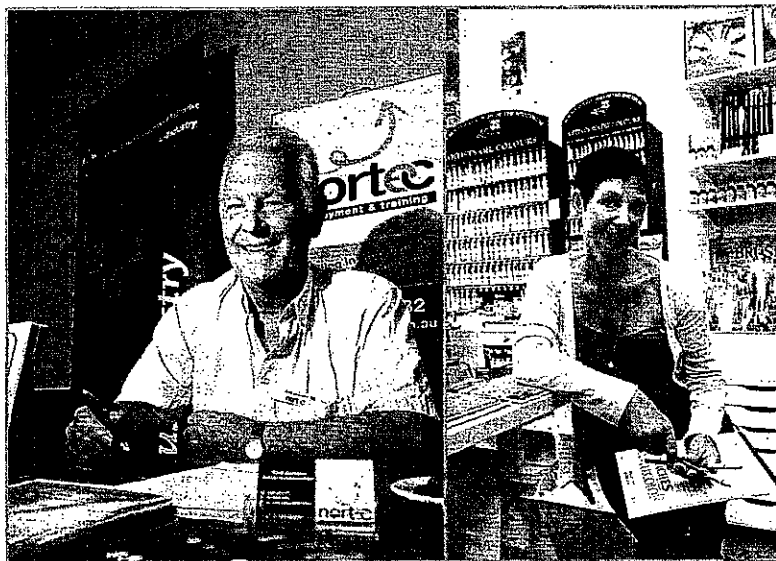
"The first step is to want to do it. You've got to be passionate about what you want to do. If you are passionate about something you'll be committed. I've never once thought 'what if this doesn't work'. I've always thought I'm having a go at it and that's never been in the back of my mind. I've never had a negative thought about what would happen. I think that has contributed to the way The Little Art Shop has grown.

"There are so many things you can advise people to do and not to do.

"I just always followed my heart and things have really worked out for us."

To find information about setting up your business, visit the Department of State and Regional Development site at www.smallbiz.nsw.gov.au. For information on NORTEC Business Incubators visit www.nortecld.com.au

You've got an idea, you're ready to start a business - where to from there? **MARGIE BENSON** talks to business expert **Paul Jameson** about the ABC - or the 123 - of business basics



BUSINESS EXPERT: Paul Jameson (far left); Business owner Georgie Ward at The Little Art Shop in Alstonville.

Pictures: JACKLYN WAGNER

THE LOWDOWN

- **Network:** One of the most effective things a new business can do is network. It is absolutely vital.
- **Build on your knowledge:** Become an expert in all the areas that are important to your business through training courses and ongoing education.
- **Plan your business idea:** Businesses that have business plans succeed much more often than those that don't. Take time to create your business plan.
- **Assess your capital:** One of the big problems in starting a business is undercapitalisation. Assess your capital needs carefully and search for means to assist.
- **Fear not:** Courage and the willingness to take risks is a big part of starting up a small business.