



NEWS



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PETER WAY AHEAD OF HIS TIME

RETAILERS URGED TO START THINKING ABOUT CHRISTMAS

Meet one of the men who truly changed the way Australians do their shopping and he did it with hats – mainly Akubra hats.

Peter O’Grady was one of the pioneers of online selling through his Gold Coast based business, Hats by the Hundred.

However Peter, well ahead of his time, started selling hats this way long before doing business online became a way of life.

And he introduced online selling while in his 60’s when many other people, who have had a busy life in business, would be considering retirement.

Peter’s role in pioneering online selling came to light when Google recently mounted a campaign in which it urged retailers to start thinking about Christmas sales now.

The head of SMB marketing for Google Australia, Rich Flanagan, said consumers start to research gift ideas months in advance.

“Clever retailers should start thinking now about their online marketing plans for Christmas,” Mr. Flanagan said.



TIME TO RELAX: Peter O’Grady with his daughter Marion as he prepares to launch one of his model boats. Peter might be relaxing but for online retailers it’s time to get busy and prepare for Christmas.

Brisbane’s The Courier-Mail featured the comments and used Peter’s role in online marketing to illustrate the story.

Peter O’Grady sold his online business two years ago and retired to sail model boats.

His daughter Marion, who owned and operated the retail store with the same name, recently moved the business to Robina, one of the Gold Coast’s growth centres, and renamed the business The Hat Store.

“When Dad sold the business the name went with it,” she said.

“We are developing a new web site but, of course, it’s not as big as the one Dad started.

“Dad was an innovator.

“In the early days orders were taken by email but there was no way we were going to ask customers to send us their credit card details by email.

“It was simply not secure enough so we would phone customers after they had placed an order and get their card details that way.

“We had to phone, not only around Australia but all over the world.

“It became tricky with the overseas calls because of time differences.

“We didn’t want to be getting someone out of bed at 3am.

“As you can imagine, the phone bills were pretty big.”

FROM LITTLE THINGS, BIG THINGS GROW

The old saying – from little things big things grow – has never been more apt in the case of Graeme and Jan Aitken from Aitkens Saddlery at Loganholme, midway between Brisbane and the Gold Coast.



BIG THINGS: Jan and Bec Aitken and their extensive range of Akubra hats.

We'll let Jan tell the story.

"Some time ago one of our clients moved to Sydney and rang us to ask if we could go down and do a saddle fitting for her," Jan said.

"We said we would do it if she could get together 15 people who wanted fittings.

"She got the 15, we made the trip and before we knew it other people were ringing and asking if we could do the same thing for them."

Saddle fitting is now a significant part of the business covering an area from Bundaberg to Tasmania.

Every eight weeks Graeme and Jan load their large van and travel around NSW while they travel to Tasmania four times a year.

Meanwhile daughter Tracey lives in Victoria and covers that state while also looking after two small children.

Both Graeme and Tracey hold certificates in Masters in Saddlery from the UK.

Meanwhile, back at the Loganholme store son Ben and son in law Greg Duggan look after the web site, while also building a new one, while daughter Bec handles the accounts, facebook and ordering.

And Akubra hats form a big part of the in store display.

"Our Akubra display, per square metre, is the busiest part of the store," Jan said.

"Our number one seller is the Cattleman, followed by the Rough Rider and Territory.

"Last summer we did a skin care promotion through the local press stressing the importance of using sun block and a hat and we sold a lot of Akubras from that.

"Sales of wallets and belts are also growing."

A SNOWY BY THE RIVER



WHERE ELSE?: Rick Harris had to show off his new Snowy River and this site was the obvious choice when you live so close.

When you are the proud owner of a new Snowy River where else do you show it off than on the banks of the river with the same name, especially when you live in the Snowy Mountains.

Rick and Joy Harris from Cooma passed through Kempsey recently on a caravanning holiday and caught up with Akubra board member and former company secretary, Terry Hunt.

Rick needed a new Akubra, Terry recommended a Snow River and Kempsey, the home of Akubra, was just the place for Rick to fulfil his wish.

"Rick was so proud of that hat when we got home he had to have his picture taken on the Snowy River," Joy said.

"It was a beautiful day and a great setting."

WORTH A TRY!

People will do anything to get a new Akubra.

A customer took this very battered black Arena into Doug Dydes Produce in Albury and claimed it was only 18 months old and had not lived up to expectations.

Would they replace it?

Paul Ziebarth from Doug Dydes was skeptical.

“He had not bought it from us, could not produce any receipt and I very much doubted his story but I said, as a matter of faith, I would refer it to our supplier, Maarty Stroot (from Karma Beach),” Paul said.

“The next time Maarty was here he took one look at the hat and said he (the customer) had to be kidding.”

However the customer still got a new Akubra.

Probably believing his story was a long shot, the day he took the hat into the store he bought another black Arena anyway.

WE DON'T THINK SO:
The battered Akubra, definitely a lot older than 18 months.



AKUBRA MOVES TO THE 21ST CENTURY

We, at Akubra, have been steadily working towards significant upgrades to our computer operations.

This work is now substantially complete with a new manufacturing system being developed over the past two years and the introduction on July 1 of a new accounting system.

This is the first technology upgrade for this company in 25 years and has resulted in some dramatic changes internally.

Whilst the changes for our customers should be minimal overall, these upgrades should deliver greater efficiencies to the company over the longer term.

All retail customers will receive letters shortly explaining some of the changes and how it will impact on the management of their accounts.

The goal is to streamline production to ensure efficient deliveries to customers in a timely manner.

We acknowledge that deliveries in the past have not been up to our usual high standard but we now believe that those days are behind us.

We would like to thank all our customers for their support – both in the past and in the future.

GOODBYE SHELLEY, HELLO JODIE

Shelley Crotty, one of our long time front office staff and a voice that many retailers have come to know over her 27 years with Akubra, is retiring.

In her place comes Jodie Bartrop, originally from Melbourne but now settled in Kempsey with her husband Craig.

Jodie takes over Shelley's role in invoicing and payroll.

Shelley's decision to retire is not unexpected.

Her partner, John Graham, Akubra's former Despatch Manager, retired in June last year and Shelley hinted then she would eventually follow.

“John wanted me to wait 12 months,” Shelley said.

“The 12 months is up and we want to do some travelling, especially in Western

Australia, but we will definitely not be buying a caravan.

“We did that with children and we are both cured.

“Motels and cabins will be much more comfortable.

“My son Aaron is in Ireland and we would like to meet up with him there.

“It is sad to leave Akubra because I have truly loved my job and my 27 years with the company have been wonderful.”

Jodie comes to Akubra with skills in administration and especially in logistics.

“Down the track I believe my logistics skills might be used but in the meantime I am getting my head around my new role and the new systems that have just been introduced here,” Jodie said.

“It's really exciting being here and Shelley has been a wonderful teacher.”



CHANGE OF THE GUARD: Shelley Crotty (top) heads for retirement while Jodie Bartrop (bottom) settles in behind her new desk.

HERE'S AN IDEA! LET'S OPEN A SHOP

Identifying a need and then acting on it has been a winner for Helen Cole and Brian Gray from Jimboola in Queensland.

They got so sick of having to travel long distances to buy horse gear and country clothing they opened their own shop, Horse 'N' Rider, at Easter.

"We have so many people come into the shop and say they wish they had done it," Helen said.

"We saw there was an opportunity, took a huge breath and plunged in and so far the business is going very well."

Jimboola is a rapidly growing town between Beaudesert and Brisbane and in the middle of some of Queensland's best horse country.

Helen and Brian grew up with horses, first in pony club and later in the show ring.

Helen also worked in racing stables for six years, first as a strapper and later as an apprentice jockey.

A shop of this type has to carry a range of Akubra hats and Helen says they are big seller.

"We have six styles but the Cattleman is our most popular," Helen said.



INSPIRATION: Helen Cole in the new shop and the eye catching display of Akubra hats.

CALL THE MIDWIVES



WHAT A SPECTACLE: The 50 Australian delegates to the World Congress of Midwives in Prague in May certainly made their presence felt with each wearing, or in this case throwing, red Akubra hats.

The hats were part of their uniform and while there were more than 3700 participants from around the world the Australians really stood out.

NOTE TO RETAIL CUSTOMERS

Feathers will no longer be supplied with hats. This decision has been made for a number of reasons.

Feathers are becoming increasingly hard to source and the raw cost of feathers has quadrupled in the past year.

We cannot even be guaranteed to get the same feather types when we reorder. On top of this new Australian quarantine restrictions are making it increasingly difficult to import feathers from Asia and consequently the cost in this area has also increased dramatically.

We have also received complaints from customers that the feathers are crushed during the packing process.

We still have some remaining stocks of feathers which can be ordered separately at a cost of \$9.00/pack of 12.

These will be provided in a separate bag inside your delivery. Unfortunately we are not in a position to offer specific colours. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause you and your customers.



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