

BUSINESS ENTERPRISE

PROFILE

It's all about optimisation

Serial entrepreneur Llew Jury believes in the importance of identifying niche markets that clients don't know they need yet, writes **Mark Fenton-Jones**.

A former Indonesian-language student and serial entrepreneur has some first-rate advice for anyone thinking of starting a business.

"Hire the right people. Nurture them and make them feel part of a flat management structure," says Reload Media chief executive Llew Jury.

Jury, who studied Indonesian, politics and geography at the Australian National University, has set up two successful internet-based businesses in the past decade.

He founded the first, Alfresco Design, in 1999 with his brother Al after spending a year working for an IT company learning about web design.

"After researching the Queensland market, we found that web design was an emerging market and there was a need for small and medium-sized enterprises to have customer-focused solutions," Jury says.

Using their father's old Pentium 1 computer to get started, the brothers set up the foundations of their web design company at home with milk crates and cushions as furniture. In 2001, Jury came across a feature of the internet that would later become the basis for his second company. In that year, his company started doing search engine optimisation for its own marketing and made it to the first page of searches for web design in Australia.

As a result, the brothers won their first contract with resource giant Rio Tinto. By 2005, the business was rated 31st in the Deloitte list of top 50 fast-growing companies, delivering 145 per cent revenue growth in three years. When he and his brother sold the business of 26 staff in 2006 for more than \$1 million to John Singleton's Next Digital,

which wanted a Brisbane presence and a web design shop, Alfresco Design was Queensland's largest web design company. The sale suited Jury, who had become a father and wanted a change.

But he still regarded the seven years at his first business as a practical business school.

"My Alfresco days were like doing a virtual MBA," he says. "They were a key plan in my learning and development. It's why Reload is growing, because of my Alfresco experience."

Among the lessons he learnt was to "love your staff. We had an amazing corporate culture developed through inclusive activities such as football nights, beach trips, pizza nights, industry lunches and client parties.

"We also had a masseuse very early on that we paid for weekly, before it became a corporate trend. We had a very low turnover of staff as a result."

His experience at Alfresco also showed him how important it is to identify a niche market that a client wants to go to but doesn't know they need.

"At Reload Media, we have pretty much done the same. Web design in the late '90s was an emerging industry, just like digital marketing and search engine optimisation today with SMEs."

After taking a break with his family to visit some of the nation's wine regions, Jury established Reload Consulting in an office under his Brisbane house to provide web and business strategy advice.

Web design, search and digital strategy was out of the question as he was restrained by his deal with Next Digital from doing this type of work for two years.

As the end of the restraint period approached, Jury hired 19-year-old Craig Somerville to work with him at Reload Consulting at



Llew Jury says his 'rubber' business plan allows for tactical tweaking. Photo Glenn Hunt

Clients don't mind where you're located provided the number of quality visits to their website is going up.

his home office. He started part-time on consulting, but went full-time once Reload Media took off because of the rapid uptake of digital marketing services. Somerville has since become an integral part of Jury's venture to concentrate on search engine optimisation and search engine marketing.

Reload was started in May 2008 with capital of just \$500, but within three months it had moved to a proper office with four staff. In April 2009, it moved to bigger premises in Toowong in Brisbane when staff numbers reached seven.

Despite strong demand from clients outside Brisbane – there were 30 clients in the first year of operation and Reload now has 250 globally – the business serviced Australian clients online or from the Brisbane head office.

This year Reload will open offices in Sydney and Melbourne. "Clients don't mind where

you're located provided the number of quality visits to their website is going up," Jury says.

He attributes the strong demand not just to technological competency but also to customer service, such as returning calls and providing strategic advice.

In financial 2008, Reload turned over \$500,000. It more than doubled that the following year.

This year, Jury expects turnover to more than double again to \$2.25 million. And the growth, all self-funded, hasn't stopped.

"Soon we'll be moving to a new office in Brisbane with seven times the current space," Jury says.

The company has 20 staff each in Australia and India and has opened offices in London and Auckland with one representative in each. Expansion into Asia and the United States is a possibility, but Jury wants to capitalise on existing markets before moving into those regions.

He describes his two-page business plan as a rubber one. "Our business plans needs to be flexible and malleable. We are moving and growing at such a rapid pace that we need to use it as a strategic guide and then tweak the tactical as we go."

Reload established its international offices first – before pressing ahead beyond Brisbane in Australia – to get a jump on the competition.

"New Zealand was first because of the cheaper labour and rental, followed by the UK," he says.

Overseeing the international expansion is Somerville, now 22 and general manager of Reload Media, who so impressed Jury with his business approach that Jury gave him a 25 per cent shareholding in the Reload Business Group.

Besides hiring the right people, the Reload founder advises finding someone to chase accounts receivable.

"Early on we got someone who is good at chasing down money," he says. "That funded everything we did. Otherwise it restricts the ability to grow."