



Do you need to be a petrol head to take on a franchise in the automotive sector? No.....and yes. It's true that most of the skills involved can be can be taught – but what can't be taught is passion. However impressively a franchise stacks up on paper, passion is the fuel that drives the hard work and dedication fundamental to every successful business.

ecowash mobile franchisee Sue Taylor gets many calls from people considering a franchise.

“Some ask hundreds of questions about every tiny detail of the business, yet they’re stumped when I ask them to name their favourite car,” she says. “If you don’t like cars enough to have a favourite how are you going to motivate yourself to get out of bed to clean them every day?”

Taylor was working in a job she hated when an Ecowash franchisee happened to drop into her office.

“My partner and I had often talked about starting our own business but it had never taken shape until then,” she says. “We were intrigued by the concept of washing cars without water and decided to investigate – and we more or less made our minds up on the spot. We both love cars and I’ve always enjoyed making my own car look good. We also like the environmental aspect.”

In just five years, ecowash mobile has become the world’s leading mobile waterless franchise with over 120 units in Australia, the Middle East, Europe and the USA. Founders Jim Cornish and Stewart Nicholls planned to build a franchised business from the outset and Cornish believes that developing systems from scratch helped them to grow fast.

“Our goal was to create a model that Stewart or I would want to buy,” says Cornish. “Our parameters were a lifestyle business that’s renewable and sustainable and also happy – you’ve got to have a good head space. Our franchisees control their own hours and, when they get out in the evening, they don’t take work home with them. And ecowash is all about happiness – taking a dirty car and making it clean.”

ecowash mobile produces its own line of products and, in the early days, franchisees saw this as the greatest benefit. Today, thanks to the dedication of Cornish and Nicholls, it’s the brand; last year they invested four times the amount they received in advertising levies.

“At our last conference we had a presentation showing exactly what you’d need to spend if you were starting own business,” says Cornish. “The list included a logo, protection for your IP, a website, a toll free number, advertising in places like The Yellow Pages – \$300 a month wouldn’t even come close. With a franchise the economies of scale are incredible; each franchisee needs to understand that these are not just something they share but resources they can use as their own.”

Since franchises in Western Australia made the company officially national, ecowash has attracted major clients including Holden and Audi.

“Internationally, we just did a launch for Lamborghini in the US and we do the Cannes Film Festival for Audi every year in France,” says Cornish. “Franchisees get instant credibility – you couldn’t do that as sole trader.”

“With Ecowash you get a lot of bang for your buck,” says Taylor. “Even your initial investment of \$55k comes with the car, your territory, training, uniform, marketing – everything you need.”

Taylor and her partner now own three territories and a full-time employee with her own car.

“We found that, with some other franchises, you buy a territory and a van or a car and that’s it – if you get too busy there’s nothing you can do about it. With Ecowash, if you want 10 cars in one territory you can do it. If you want to subfranchise you can do it. And now they’ve expanded internationally you can even buy a franchise overseas and put a manager in to run it for you. There’s a huge amount of scope, especially as it’s so affordable to get into.”

### **Specialists in suspension**

Established in 1950, Pedders Suspension has been franchising since 1979. Today there are over 120 outlets around Australia, 66 of which are franchised. There are also Pedders outlets in New Zealand, Asia and the USA. An iconic name within the automotive industry, Pedders recently opened the door to broader brand recognition by becoming an official sponsor of V8 supercars.

“Pedders makes money from manufacturing and selling its own products,” says Group Marketing Manager Adam Gillick. “As a result, our franchisees don’t pay ongoing royalties, the advertising levy is just 3 per cent.

“Franchisees also have two potential markets – retail, and wholesale to other automotive workshops in the area. This creates a wealth of opportunity for regular repeat and referral business.

Grant Phillips grasped the opportunity with both hands. Based in Bendigo, his multi-award-winning store regularly equals sales figures from metropolitan outlets servicing twice the population. As his success is stretching his current premises to their limits he’s building a new superstore.

“When it’s finished, it will be the biggest in Australia,” he says.

Phillips once worked in the workshop of the Pedders franchise he now owns.

“I liked the products and the way my boss did business so, when he was ready to sell, I bought the business off him.”

Phillips knew all about the challenges of running an independent business – his first job was in his father’s hire company.

“It’s certainly a lot tougher on your own – you just don’t get the support,” he says. “You also need to stay very motivated, and going to a conference or talking to other franchisees can give you a real boost.”

Pedders franchisees receive a week-long internal training course followed by a month-long induction period. They then have the backing of state and regional management teams, as well as support in marketing and product management.

"When you're a franchise owner, you're treated as one of the family," says Gillick. "That's our culture, from the directors down."

"If you had a problem, head office would help any store get back on track, no issue," says Phillips. "But, in the end, it's down to you and how much you're prepared to put into the business; you're still in your own business whatever name is on the front door. I have a great crew behind me, I'm dedicated and I'm really passionate about what I do. It's never felt like a job to me – I look forward to getting up and getting started every morning."

### **Powering on**

Since taking over as general manager of Battery Power in 2004, James Nixon-Smith has overseen major changes across all areas of the business, from implementing a national point-of-sale program to updating store fit-outs and invigorating the national marketing strategy. According to the Franchisee Relationships Institute franchisees are happy with the results – a recent survey showed high levels of satisfaction as well as optimism about the future of their business.

Along with cars, trucks, boats, motorcycles and tractors, Battery World supplies batteries for just about every household application.

"Batteries are a part of everyday life and the future is in portable technology," says Nixon-Smith. "We have access to more than 8,000 batteries and accessories so, as this sector continues to flourish, so too will Battery World."

Glenn Shenton had been considering a franchise for over 10 years when he made his decision.

"I always had four boxes to tick – a return on investment of over 30 per cent; a business that would be easy to sell in the future; a professional environment; and the potential to grow by replicating success. Most of the franchises I looked at could not tick all of them."

After nine months, with stores at both Burleigh Heads and Tweed Heads, the business is living up to his expectations.

Gary Sibthorpe opened a Battery World franchise in 2006 after 28 years as a tradesman.

"I had been working 60+ hours a week for an employer; I decided it was time to put the effort into my own enterprise," he says.

Cautious by nature, he spent a great deal of time researching a number of systems and is confident he made the right decision.

"Retail food or similar wasn't an option to me," he says. "Being a tradesman I know the value of client service and using quality product. I was looking to provide solutions to problems, being hands-on with the customers and providing service on a personal level."

"Obviously, as with any new business, the first 12 months is a steep learning curve, but one of the reasons you join a successful franchise system is for the strength of support from other franchisees and the head office of the franchisor. You have to be 100 per cent committed to the business and trust the system because, if it has worked for everyone else, then it will work for you. After that it's down to service, service, service. You need to become an expert – be bullet proof to the customer by knowing the product inside out and sticking to the facts. Success is built on daily commitment and consistency."

## **The right tools for the job**

Snap-on is a leading global developer, manufacturer and marketer of tool and equipment solutions for professional tool users, including the NASA space program. The range of over 19,000 products is available only through the franchisee network; franchisees visit each customer every week in their mobile, high-tech retail store.

“Within the automotive and aviation industries we’re a household name, but outside we are less well known,” says National Franchising Manager Nick Hudson. “As a result, the majority of our franchisees have come from industries that we service – not because you need mechanical or automotive background to succeed but simply because they understand our brand, our product and the rudiments of our franchise.”

A PR company is helping them attract new franchisees from further afield.

“We can teach people about products and tools so we look for attributes we can’t teach,” says Hudson. “You could be the best mechanic in the world, but if you’re the kind of person who could have an argument in an empty room you’ll never be successful in our business. We’re all about relationships. If you don’t like building relationships or the retail environment, ours is definitely not the franchise for you.”

Anyone thinking of buying into Snap-on spends a day with at least three different franchisees, each at a different stage of the business.

“We want to be sure they see every aspect and feel confident that they are making a good business decision,” says Hudson. “Once they’ve joined us, training includes a six-day ‘boot camp’ in Dallas, Texas and two days at the national distribution centre in Sydney. A sales development manager then rides with recruits in their own territory for three weeks.”

When Edward Dakhoul bought a franchise earlier this year he already knew the business inside out.

“I started working with Snap-on 13 years ago as a trainee field manager and was keen to move up through the company,” he says. “Eventually I felt it was time to move on so I decided to buy a franchise and put everything I know into practice. I may be biased but, as far as I’m concerned, you can’t go past Snap-on. You’ve got the brand and the reputation and you also have weekends to spend with your family.”

Dakhoul believes that, in any good system, it’s the support of the network that makes franchising is the most beneficial business tool in the world.

“Because I knew the business so well I didn’t think I’d need support but I’m still finding it very helpful,” he says. “At the beginning there’s a lot to learn and every business has its ups and downs. As a franchisee, if you have a problem, someone else has inevitably been through it before and everyone is keen to help.”

