



It's not so long since phones had dials and computers were for big business only. Today, many homes have wireless networks serving two or more computers, while even small businesses are processing enough data to warrant a server-based system. There's also been a huge shift towards mobile technology – we want to be able to access information, stay in contact and be entertained any time, anywhere. We want our equipment and our data to be protected and secure. And, as we grow increasingly dependent on technology, we don't just expect our phones and computers to work, we *need* them to work. Most of us can't imagine functioning without them.

The speed at which both technology and customer expectations move and change has been the downfall of businesses large and small. At the same time, the demand shows no sign of abating; there is huge potential for IT and telecom franchises which are able to negotiate change, pinpoint opportunities and act quickly to provide franchisees with the information and support they need to stay on top of their game.

Gee Whizz

- Operating since 1993, started franchising in 2005
- Now five stores in the Hunter area and three in Sydney.
- Plan to open another nine stores in Australia over the next one to two years and to start expanding internationally.

Alan Gee, CEO

Our aim is to provide everything our customers could want in a comfortable and friendly environment and for them to feel confident that they're in safe hands.

There's not one area of IT we don't cover. We build computers and we're a warranty and authorised repair centre for all brands and models. We also offer everything from web design, development and content management to data base platform and migration.

Our customers have the security of knowing that we've been around for a long time and have built a solid reputation. All of our computers come with a standard three year warranty and we service everything we sell.

We're also very price competitive as we deal directly with the importer, though one lesson we learned early on is that price isn't everything. People want to know they're getting the very best product, so that's what we stock now.

People expect us to be looking for technicians as franchisees but I generally prefer people who don't have technical background; they less likely to have preconceived ideas about how a shop should run. We're very much customer focused – every aspect of our stores has been designed to make customers feel welcome, from the colour scheme to the layout. We also look for franchisees who are customer service orientated, who can work the showroom floor and build a rapport with customers.

Each franchisee then brings on a technician we have trained – each store specialises in a particular area of the business and we share all of our expertise. Our technicians update each other all the time and the latest technical information is always available on our website. We're also continuously in touch with our franchisees and bi-annual conferences provide a chance to thrash out latest issues so everyone is always up to speed.

Computer Solutions Sales and Service

- Tony and Linda Bristow started the franchise in 2004
- Now six franchisees in Australia and one in New Zealand
- Plan to establish a network of franchisees across Australia and New Zealand focusing on the small to medium business market

Paul Andersen Director and CEO

Our target market may come to us with a specific request when they are really looking for a business solution. For instance, they may ask for a server when other products and services would better meet their need for improved productivity, data protection or security. Our franchisees help their customers to identify the real issue and then provide a well-researched, holistic solution. While domestic consumers are still heavily price-driven, we're finding that business customers are increasingly seeing the value in working with technology specialists in order to maximise their investment in technology rather than simply 'buying the box'.

The ideal Computer Solutions franchisee has good-to-strong IT technical skills but also really care about his or her customers. We excel in providing systems, training and support which enable someone who meets these criteria but is less strong in business and/or marketing to develop a successful business. While we provide recommendations in terms of service delivery models, suppliers, pricing, products and services we don't dictate, so individual businesses inevitably have a 'flavour' reflecting the franchisee's personality, skill set and interests.

We communicate with customers and potential customers in traditional ways ... canvassing, telemarketing, direct mail, referral programs and so on... but we also encourage our franchisees to meet regularly with their customers over coffee or in networking situations where they can really listen to their problems and concerns.

Over the next 12 months we shall be focusing on weeding through enquires and selecting the right prospects – the people that best meet our business ethos and ethics. While predicting the future is not our business, we are aiming to have three or four franchisees join our franchise network each year.

Hi Speed Internet Kiosks

- Operating since 2004, franchising since late 2007
- 90 kiosks in 70 locations, 35 franchised
- Aiming for at least 130 installed locations across Australia by the end of the next financial year and to open in New Zealand early next year.

Stephen Burns

General manager of marketing and commercial

We were one of the first multi-seat kiosks to operate in Australia and we believe we're now the largest. We're generally located in major shopping centres, with two kiosks in some of the bigger ones.

Our kiosks provide exceptionally high internet speeds and we will soon be adding wireless services, colour printing, faxing and scanning services. The kiosks range in size from a three seat model, which costs around \$20,000 fully installed; most franchisees choose between three and 12 seats.

The business grew out of tourism – the need for transient people to use the internet. Now we also attract many of the eight to 10 million Australians who don't have high speed broadband at home. In the shopping centres, most of people who work there use a kiosk, including some of the business owners. At least 150,000 people use us on average every month and that number is growing fast.

Our business is different from most franchises in that it's more like a vending model – a passive investment. It can be a full time job for someone who invests in four or five but one kiosk involves just three or four hours' work a week. Even that's optional because you can opt to have us do all of the service and maintenance for you. Franchisees don't need any technical skills – we have students, retirees and people who were burned by the stock market and looking for a different type of investment. 60 per cent of our current franchisees don't go anywhere near the business; at the end of every month we simply bank the takings, take out the costs and direct deposit their return. All they have to do is organise their insurance and accounting at the end of the year.

The Computer Market

- Started franchising 2004.
- Currently 13 stores in Queensland
- Goal is to have 60 stores around Australia

John Ferrett

Co-founder with Kurt Kratzmann

Our business is selling ex-government computers for half or a third the price of a new one – we've been doing that successfully for 12 years. Our biggest markets are people needing a second or third computer in the home and businesses that just want to run everyday software.

People come to us because they don't need the latest and greatest in computers but they do want security. They like buying from a proper computer store with technicians they can talk to, getting reliable advice and, of course, a good warranty.

We physically re-image every computer so it's brand new as far as the software is concerned with all available updates and an anti-virus package. In terms of quality, the research has already been done – government departments know what they're buying.

We started franchising when the business had expanded to three stores. We don't put anyone into a store unless 100 per cent sure he or she can do the job – we were told from the start that you don't sell franchises, you grant them. All of our current franchisees either started out as employees or came to us by word of mouth and, with a mix of single, double and multistore franchisees, just four franchisees have 13 stores between them.

Slow, organic growth is nice but, now that we're ready to expand into other states, we're starting to focus on more active recruiting. Our research has shown that businesses with similar-sized territories and a similar number of stores in Queensland support around 60 stores across Australia so we're aiming for the same.

We look for people with business rather than technical skills – good communication, the ability to relate to customers and, though we know it can be hard to judge, honesty and integrity. We're also looking to form sound, long-term relationships with our franchisees. Franchising is like a commercial marriage so it helps if people are like minded to some extent.

Telcoinabox

- Started franchising 2002.
- 70 franchises in Australia, 10 across the UK and New Zealand.
- Over the next five 5 plan to launch into three new countries and achieve international retail turnover of over A\$200m.

Damian Kay Founder and Managing Director

Being a Telecommunications Reseller generally requires intimate knowledge, experience, contacts and carrier relationships as well as approximately \$200,000 to set up. In 2002 we had an idea for breaking down these barriers to entry and decided early on that a franchised model was the way to go, but one with a difference. Instead of a common brand and specific territories we offer a proven business system that is not limited by geographical bounds so income is also not limited. We also offer sensational training and support and regularly add new products and services.

We are definitely not looking for people who want to buy a job but those who are more entrepreneurial. As we don't really look like a typical franchise we tend to attract this type of franchisee by default. We also require that they are ready to build a business, have the support of their friends and family, have sales experience and are hungry for success.

Having a more 'one on one' relationship with their customers is a core offering of our franchisees and one which differentiates them from the competition. It's all about the full service that business customers especially require – our franchisees will go out and find the best solution for their customers even if they don't supply it to them. As a result, most of our franchisees grow entirely from referrals – as we know, that's the best business to get as it is loyal and cheap to acquire.

Consumers are looking more than ever to save money – they want a better service at a value price and it is the 'sweet spot' of our franchisees. They are able to save businesses and consumers between 20 and 30 per cent on their telephony costs at the same time as offering a far superior service. Technology is key but this is less important than the price/service framework.

Computer Troubleshooters

- Started franchising 1997
- Over 80 franchisees in Australia and almost 500 across 27 countries worldwide
- Aim to establish over 1000 franchise outlets globally in the next 2 years. In 2008 the majority of Computer Troubleshooters Global was purchased by Merrymeeting, Inc., an American investment company which owns or controls 6 franchise companies with more than 1,700 franchised locations, over 25 per cent of which are outside the US.

Nick Roche National Director

We grew to be Australia's largest IT service franchise by focusing on small business. Small business customers realise that, without good IT support, their business would often be dead in the water. They see us as their trusted IT advisor, there not just to fix problems but to help them protect their business and get the most out of their IT.

We have found that the potential market for a credible franchise network offering on-site computer services is huge. Almost all small businesses and home offices use computers and depend on them to be working properly. They do not have the skills, the time or the desire to do their own computer service, repair and upgrades and that puts us right in the middle of one of the fastest growing industries in the world.

A typical franchisee is an experienced IT-savvy professional with 10 – 20 years' experience in the corporate world who is looking for a challenging small business as an alternative for lifestyle, financial and personal development reasons. The other key part of the equation is commitment to make the business work – 100 per cent investment in terms of time and energy.

Some franchisees operate from a home base, handling most of the technical work themselves, while some start with a service centre, managing technical staff who handle the day-to-day work. In reality most start out with a home-based operation then expand into a service centre with a more managerial role as the business grows. With Computer Troubleshooters, all franchisees have access to the scale and experience of an established market leader.