

Business profile

What are your business interests?

I am the proprietor and chef of Fairways Guesthouse and Champion's Restaurant in Lancefield, and the owner of Peppercorn Cottage in Lancefield, a short term and weekend rental B&B.

I am also the owner and buyer of the Excessories boutiques in Lancefield, Woodend, and Kilmore, selling women's fashion and accessories, shoes and homewares.

Additionally, I own and drive a racing car for the Mitsubishi EVO8 race team, racing in the Australian Performance Category, which is televised on Trackside on Channel 10.

How and when did you start your business?

For 13 years, I successfully ran retail stores in America, and was the runner up in the *Masterchef USA* TV cooking show. I returned to Australia five years ago and renovated and started the guesthouse. Just over a year ago I opened the first Excessories store in Lancefield, followed by Woodend in November, and last week we had the grand opening of our Kilmore store.

How long did it take to build up your business, and what hours did you work in the early stages?

In America it took a couple of years of pretty much working around the clock, anything up to 20 hours a day and seven days a week. I started my business during a recession, but once we worked through that, the stores became extremely profitable.

In Australia it was much easier because I had the experience, know-how and structure to work with. I still work very hard, but I do take time off to travel extensively and race cars. I also attribute this to the fabulous team working with me.

How have you found being in business in this industry?

Fashion retailing is very exciting, as is it con-

LYNNE CHAMPION — EXCESSORIES BOUTIQUE



Fast track: Lynne Champion with her racing car. Her Excessories Boutiques have been nominated for a Telstra Small Business Award.

everything we can to make sure our customers are happy.

What advice would you give other business owners?

Stay focused, work hard, find the right people to work with you and then look after them, and learn by your mistakes. Smile, laugh, stay fit and healthy, get a good night's sleep, and have as much fun with your business as you possibly can - it rubs off, and will be reflected in your association with your customers.

Pay your suppliers on time and build a rapport with them, so that you have a great working relationship. They will then do the right thing by you.

If there was one thing you could do differently, what would it be?

Actually, I can't think of one thing. I would not change anything. Yes, I have made a few mistakes, but hopefully I have learnt from them and as a result have become a better person.

What are some key points people should know about your industry?

Stay in touch with what's happening in fashion and the home, trends change and you have to be ready to go with it when it happens. Your business should always look new and fresh - you have to give your customers a reason to keep coming back.

stantly changing. We are kept on our toes, staying abreast of trends and knowing what our customers want. This also keeps it exciting for us.

To what do you attribute your success?

Hard work, staying focused, and not trying to be all things to all people. Having a dedicated team of girls who offer enormous input and run

it as if it were their own business really helps. We also run a "lean ship", we don't go spending huge amounts on outfitting stores, but are creative in making them cosy and appealing, and we don't take on mortgages. Our motto is "if we can't pay cash for it, we can't have it." We pride ourselves on customer service - we will do