

All Bouquets, no brickbats

When she started her small business 10 years ago, Louise Curtis had no idea she would create a second business that would become a national franchise success story.

Louise Curtis hated working as a teenage check-out chick, but as 'Business Chick', and ACT Telstra Business Women's Award winner in 2008, she showed a natural flair for business management. Leaving school early, she eventually worked as a mortgage broker in Sydney, before moving to Canberra in 2000.

When she had difficulty finding good quality gifts for her employer Louise made up hampers at home. She soon realised its business potential and in 2002 launched Hamperesque, selling corporate gifts online. Her success was honoured with the Telstra award. "The \$20,000 prize money I wanted to use for something innovative," she says. As the GFC had slowed demand, she decided to attack the retail market by launching a new franchise specialising in gifts made of "everything chocolate". Louise designed a range of chocolate bouquets in pots to tempt online and personal shoppers.

Husband Matthew came up with the final 'z' before Lollypotz was launched. "We're an accidental success story," says Louise, but turnover of \$2 million in the first six months of trading and \$7 million in 2010 make that a fortunate accident. Lollypotz sold 55,000 items in 2011.

Along the way Louise managed to juggle raising two sons, and with two babies in the office she became a champion for family friendly workplaces. Many franchisees are owned by women with

young children, and Louise explains Lollypotz's appeal: "I think it's an attractive proposition for women. At an affordable buy-in price it allows flexibility, and people just like the product." As a franchisee in Nowra put it: "The idea of creating stunning bouquets that were totally edible and could be made locally really excited us."

Their 120 chocolate-filled items are organised by category: Easter, Mother's Day, Potz of Love, Baby Potz, Liquor Potz, For Him, Kidz Potz and Design your Own. Louise and her team love to create new ideas, often based on customer feedback.

The Lollypotz crew of 18 includes a call centre, which takes orders for local franchises to fulfil. "I have extremely high standards of customer service, and expect the same across the board, and so we work closely with our operators to ensure they're met," says Louise. Currently 29 franchise owners cover 40 sales territories, due to consolidation in a dynamic industry. Australia's high take-up of franchising with 1,025 systems in 2010 is a fertile ground for Lollypotz to spread its sweet wings. *BRW* rankings in 2012 rated Lollypotz's 131 percent revenue growth over three years as fourth fastest and second for outlet growth.

When asked what motivates her, Louise replies: "Money! Seriously, I'm motivated by franchise owners who are striving for success – their success is my success and I love being part of that." Hopefully there's lots of lolly to come. ●



Louise Curtis.



Lollypotz

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