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# Making Education Accessible

With the education industry in a state of flux, and technology allowing new forms of online learning to prosper, the MCI Institute is at the forefront of this brave new world.

Images courtesy of MCI Institute

**D**anny Bielik, CEO of MCI, knows the value of a good education. He started his career in the IT industry with a degree in computer science. “I’m actually a computer programmer by trade. So I studied at Macquarie University back in the old days, and then I was working in the telecommunications industry for a number of years, mostly overseas.”

Danny worked all over the world in telecommunications—in America, Europe, and Asia—but ended up coming back to Australia to run his family’s business, the Australasian College of Natural Therapies (ACNT). “They asked me if I wanted to come back and run that or they were going to sell it. I ended up coming and running ACNT for about 10 years, and then I sold ACNT to Think Education Group, which is now part of Laureate International Universities.”

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- Danny Bielik

After 10 years running ACNT, Danny held a number of positions, including being on the New South Wales board for the Australian Council for Private Education, before he got a call offering him a job as a political adviser. “For about a year and half, I was the policy adviser to the New South Wales education minister, which is one of the largest education jurisdictions in the whole world. I was his policy adviser on vocational education, higher education, international, ICT, and early childhood.”

Danny was able to use his experience to influence policy, but the job also gave him an insight into how government works. “I got a level of visibility into how government works that I think a lot of business people don’t have, because a lot of people working in those offices were either policy people or looking to become politicians themselves, and I wasn’t

either. So, you know, I was a business person who went into a politician’s office and came back out still alive, so that was a pretty amazing time.”

After working as a policy adviser, Danny got involved with online education by helping set up an online college for the domestic market. Then he was offered the position of CEO of MCI. MCI specialises in online training, offering diplomas and advanced diplomas in accounting, business, management, marketing, and more. As an online learning company, it has set itself apart by being named *BRW*’s most innovative training company in 2014.

“We won the innovation award for WAMco, which is a story-based learning environment. So instead of the traditional way of doing online learning, which basically looks like smashing a text book or >







doing a test, which is the most horrendous way to teach somebody, we immerse our students in a story about a company called WAMco and you are guided through the story by really funny characters.”

The program was a real success, with students immersing themselves in the courses like Danny hadn't seen before. MCI as a company understands that not everyone learns in the same way, and therefore wants to help those who find it difficult to study to actually enjoy studying via highly engaging content.

“We did it because it's fun, but also we did it because our students are learning remotely. Sometimes they feel lonely; sometimes they have difficulty in engaging with just pages and pages of readings. Maybe they are unemployed people, maybe they are disengaged learners, or maybe their last experience with education was really, really bad at school. So it's

our responsibility to make sure that everyone from every background can engage in a simulated workplace and learn how to apply the knowledge of what they are learning.”

This is an example of how MCI, and Danny himself, approaches technology. “A lot of people are using technology to drive the cost out of their education enterprises. I think that's really the wrong approach. What online business has taught us is that you don't use technology to just drive the cost out of something; you use it to do a couple of big things.

“One is you deliver the most incredible customer experience. People will continue to use you and buy your products if you deliver a fantastic experience. Education is one of those things where people pay a lot of money for it, and you have got to keep them constantly motivated; you have got to keep them coming



back every single day for the next part of their learning and then the next part of their learning. We haven't chosen the route of trying to use technology to just drive the cost out of everything, and we believe that will give us a far more sustainable business in the long term.”

Danny also believes in encouraging innovation and creativity in his staff. He's introduced a number of work practices to help facilitate this. “We are in the process of

setting up the 'Ivan Idea' centre, which is a four-desk pod in our office where we will have brand-new Apple computers set up there and our staff will be able to take a certain amount of hours per month to just go up there and work on whatever they want; they don't even have to tell us what it is. If we stick with that, some really, really interesting creative things will come out of it.”

As with all businesses, MCI has a number of stakeholders it needs to maintain good relationships with. To ensure it gets the best outcomes from these relationships, Danny says, the key is to make them feel a part of your team. “We have a number of key suppliers, and we have a supplier-engagement strategy that we are rolling out that is about making our suppliers, our contract trainers, our students, and our other business partners feel as much a part of the MCI team as the full-time people who work in our offices do.

“I think a lot of companies underestimate the value that particularly suppliers and external collaborators really can have on the success of their business. If they wear your brand, they are going to come to you with ideas and you will hear about your products before everybody else—and, you know, you will get the special offer that other people don't get. It's just that much a nicer way of doing business.”

MCI also works closely with other education partners, and has close relationships with media companies to share its expertise and promote its business. “We work with a number of external bodies. We work with university partners who accept our graduates into their degree programs. We also work with, for example, media companies. We have a great relationship with Macquarie Radio Network, where they allow me to talk nonstop for 30 minutes to the biggest radio audience in the country on 2GB every Wednesday night, and now that's going to be networked into 4BC Brisbane and 3AW in Melbourne.”



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One reason Danny believes MCI excels is because it has built an innovative, interesting product in an industry that is just beginning. Personally, he has been able to help MCI because of his experience in so many different areas of the sector, which enables him to engage and collaborate with all the stakeholders in the online education industry. “For me, it's exciting because there are really no incumbents in the business. So you have the ability to go out there and write your own story.

“I've been given that opportunity, but it requires talking to government, which I am able to do because I know how it's done. It requires talking with other organisations; it requires working internationally and finding out what's happening outside our borders, things that we could be doing here or that we in Australia do so well we could be exporting. This is a culmination of my set of experiences, and I get to be able to bring all of that to MCI, so it's exciting.”

For the future, Danny has a plan to branch out to more businesses and students across Australia, but also internationally. With education the fourth-biggest export sector for Australia, there is a huge demand for services like those MCI provides. “We have spent the past 12 months building the most

incredible platform on which we can deliver courses in a range of different disciplines to clients, not just in Australia but all over the world. We think there is a huge appetite for what MCI is doing in corporate Australia, in smaller and medium businesses but also internationally, and we are already starting to get people knocking on our door.”

One advantage that Danny believes providers like MCI have is that, with the changing market, there is no monopoly on education in Australia. With the growing global population and the difficult job market, more people are turning to education to give them an edge. “We think that education in Australia is at day zero; we don't think anyone is the natural incumbent.

“We don't think universities have any particular natural advantage; we don't think TAFEs have any natural advantage; and we certainly don't think our competitors have any natural advantage. That's the way that we come to work every day. So we think over the next five years MCI really has an opportunity to be the market leader in corporate training, the market leader in online training, and will offer a range of different disciplines not just to Australia but to lots of international clients and students as well.” •

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