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OXWORKS

In The Office
EXECUTIVE INTERVIEW 

Built on Hard Work

Oxworks is a diversified group of companies with an industry-leading position in the manufacture and distribution of building- and hardware-related products. The company is embarking on an ambitious expansion plan into new products and territories in 2015.

Images by Fullframe Photographics

“You have to seek out efficiencies in your business, and opportunities to improve your offer to the market, in order to keep ahead of the competition and meet the expectations of your customers.”

- Glenn Hosking

Glenn Hosking and business partner Daniel Eadie started Oxworks as a two-man powder-coating business in 2001 with a strong vision for the future. Today, Oxworks has a national footprint with more than 120 full-time employees and a turnover of \$40 million annually.

After studying accountancy at Queensland University of Technology, Glenn embarked on a career as a restaurateur, with two inner-city restaurants. “I learned very quickly that your business is only as good as the staff you employ. They are your biggest asset.” After an eight-year career, Glenn decided on a career change. “I got to the stage where I was looking for something different, with regular hours a bit more conducive to family life.”

From humble beginnings, Oxworks has grown remarkably over the past decade under Glenn’s management. “We now

have a modern 6,000-square-metre manufacturing site, six sales and distribution centres across Australia, a large import program, and a full management structure. Things have evolved a lot over the past 15 years.”

Glenn believes the success of the business is due to a culture of continuous improvement and open communication. “Learning from your mistakes and always looking for opportunities to improve is the key to success. We invest heavily in our staff through training and expanding their skill set, and we give them the trust and support to perform their roles to the highest level.”

Never satisfied with the status quo, Glenn and his team are always focused on opportunities within the business. “As a group, we are constantly trying to raise the bar, in terms of our customer service, production lead times, internal processes—the list goes on. You have to seek out efficiencies in your business, and opportunities

to improve your offer to the market, in order to keep ahead of the competition and meet the expectations of your customers.”

Glenn also believes that the culture of a company has a direct impact on its success. “I believe that if you have the right culture and you’ve got the right people who are invested in that culture, then your business will reap the benefits. We generally only run small teams, so we expect a good work ethic and a teamwork ethos. We empower our employees to make good decisions and take ownership of their roles, and I think we get the best out of them because of this.”

In a changing industry, Oxworks is leading the way with innovative products. “The industry has evolved quite a lot over the past 10 years. Customers are searching for unique or customised products for their projects. In the past, a fence or balustrade was viewed as a functional product; now it’s more of an architectural feature that is >



integrated into their house or commercial building design. Adapting our products to meet the changing market has been rewarding. Our range of products and scope of works have expanded enormously to meet our customers’ expectations.”

An evolving marketplace and rapid expansion have also presented challenges to Glenn and his team. “We have invested heavily in our plant and equipment to ensure we have an efficient and diverse manufacturing capability. We are constantly searching for process improvements and new manufacturing techniques to add capacity as our business expands. We are proud of some of the innovations we have developed over the years.”

Glenn also has a strong commitment to training his expanding workforce. “Our biggest challenge has been the development of our people. We’ve expanded quite quickly, and we’ve

had to work hard on upskilling our workforce to meet the demands of the business. It’s been rewarding to see our people evolve, take on more responsibility, take on larger roles.

“We have a firm commitment to local manufacturing, and we’re proud of our workforce. Having said that, we are in a competitive industry and need to ensure our customers have access to the best-value products in the industry. Over the past several years, we have developed a large import program to source a range of products for our customers. We work closely with our overseas suppliers to ensure our quality requirements are met. Most of our high-volume, faster-moving products are manufactured to our specifications by our overseas partners. This allows our local manufacturing capacity to be more flexible and to target customised products and to deliver shorter lead times.”

Glenn believes having a competitive advantage is vital to a business’s ongoing success. “At Oxworks, we work hard to ensure we maintain our competitive advantage. Customers always have choice in the marketplace, so you have to exceed their expectations in order to stay ahead. We drive efficiencies to ensure a competitive price, and we have a culture that demands high levels of customer service; however, I think our lead times represent the main thing that sets us apart. Often, a customer’s decision to buy from us is due to our ability to supply large volumes on very short lead times, particularly with commercial projects.”

Oxworks manufactures using Just in Time (JIT) principles, so a reliable supply chain is vital to meet the company’s goals. “We’ve partnered up with most of the industry leaders to form our supply chain—BlueScope Steel, OneSteel, and Capral Aluminium. We work hard with our suppliers

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to ensure it’s a mutually beneficial relationship; it’s not a one-sided thing. Suppliers are more likely to be engaged in your business, assist you with identifying efficiencies, and work collaboratively to achieve the desired outcomes if it’s a win-win situation. You have a partner instead of a supplier.”

Over the past few years, Oxworks has invested heavily in IT solutions to streamline the business. With an eye to the future, Glenn decided to implement an ERP software solution to manage the diverse requirements of day-to-day operations. “We implemented an ERP software solution about four years ago. It was a large investment on our part, both financially and in terms of human resources. But it forced us to examine all of our business processes, so we were able to streamline a lot of functions that were previously quite time consuming. Most of our accounting, inventory, manufacturing, and reporting processes are now automated, which has allowed us to put our resources to better use.”

Implementing a computer system change like this is not without its challenges; however, according to Glenn, the end result was more than worth the investment. “We’re really starting to see the fruits of our labour. Our internal processes are clearly defined and automated, so the efficiencies we have achieved are enormous. Our entire accounts department consists of two people, which for a business our size is truly remarkable. I could list countless examples of the benefits our business has extracted, so even though the implementation process was a challenging period in our company’s history, it was certainly worth it.”

Technology has allowed Oxworks to interact with its customers in innovative ways. “How we communicate with our customers has changed. We have moved away from the traditional sales rep model, which is quite expensive and isn’t always what the customer wants. Quite a few of



our customers don’t want a person turning up to their business every month. They prefer electronic communication; they prefer to hear about your products or specials in different ways. We’ve certainly embraced different media to communicate our offer to the market.”

Multiple channels to market is a key focus for Glenn and his team. “We have four very clear channels to market. Servicing building and fencing contractors remains our primary focus, and we have a network of more than 1,500 trade customers nationally. Our retail business is also growing rapidly, particularly the DIY market. We also work with architects to ensure our suite of products is specified at project inception. More recently, we have secured supply agreements with several large hardware retailers for a number of our core products. Diversity in our channels to market is an important part of our business strategy.”

The future looks bright for Oxworks, which is looking to expand its business throughout Australia over the next two years. “We are in the middle of an extensive expansion program. We have just completed a large capital expenditure program to expand our manufacturing and distribution capacity. We are about to embark on a roll-out of several new sales and distribution centres to give us a larger geographical footprint. It’s exciting times for our business.”

Glenn is also looking forward to continuing the innovative work his company has been doing for the past 15 years. “We have a program of continual improvement, so we’re always looking at ourselves, our business, and ways we can improve. We have some really exciting new products to be released this year, and we’re opening new sites in Perth and Sydney as well. So 2015 will be another landmark year for our business.” ●

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