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SEAFOLLY

In The Office
EXECUTIVE INTERVIEW



FROM THE Sea

Australian supermodels such as Miranda Kerr, Kristy Hinze, and Jessica Hart have all been ambassadors for Seafolly, and now the brand is marking its ongoing overseas expansion with a new famous face for 2015—US fashion model Gigi Hadid.

Images courtesy of Seafolly

Australians know Seafolly for its stylish swimwear and apparel, which reflect beach culture, and now the label has been making a splash in international markets to quickly become one of the most recognised lifestyle brands around the world. Peter and Yvonne Halas created the swimwear empire from humble beginnings in 1975, and their son Anthony today holds the position of CEO.

As a young boy, Anthony recalls spending time in the cutting room, laying fabrics in the warehouse, and packing boxes full of orders each school holiday break. While he wasn't always the most enthusiastic about helping out, he grew to develop a love for the brand that is evident in his leadership style. He spent some time away pursuing other interests; however, it was inevitable that one day he would come back to play an important role in the Seafolly journey.

"I actually left the business for about seven years to study and

work as an actor," Anthony recalls. "The best role I was able to get was Hamlet in a stage show. I thought that was about as good as it was going to get for me. When that run finished, my father was very keen for me to get back into Seafolly. So I did. It was something that was in my blood, and I felt that I had a very good instinct for the business and the industry."

In 1996, Anthony was appointed export manager with the task of tapping into overseas markets. At that time, his father had a silent shareholder who owned half of the company, so in 1998 Anthony bought that partner out and he and his father became 50–50 owners. That same year, he was made CEO. "When I first came into the role of CEO, the business was doing many different things. It was doing private labels with a number of different brands, so we refocused the business. I saw an opportunity with Seafolly, which at that time was in its early stages, and just focused everyone's energy on that. The commitment and the passion that everyone put into Seafolly has really led to

exponential growth in that 16-year time period."

That refocus was an important step for the business and led to the first Seafolly flagship store opening in Chatswood, Sydney, in 2007. Today, Seafolly holds a 35-per-cent share in Australia's fashion-branded swimwear market, and that is set to increase as it continues to extend its product lines into apparel and accessories such as bags, shoes, towels, and sunglasses.

Internationally, it was in 1996 that it first began to implement its strategy for expansion into Germany and Canada. "The fact we had good people on the ground in those two markets really helped us drop the business there," Anthony says. "It has grown from there. Our first account in the UK was at Harrods, which came about because one of the buyers from a good retailer in Germany moved to become the buyer of Harrods swimwear. On the back of that, we got into Selfridges and then all the other major department stores in the UK. We are now in 42 >

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- Anthony Halas



countries, and the US is our biggest international market.”

Next on Seafolly’s sights is Asia. In December 2014, it partnered with L Capital Asia—a private equity fund sponsored by Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy (LVMH)—to make a significant push into this market. “There are enormous benefits from this relationship,” Anthony says. “First, just the contacts that they have internationally—landlords, factories, and experts in various fields. L Capital Asia is just so well connected and they have the best at their disposal. Already, just in the few months we have been working with them, we have been given great access to some amazing people who have given input into the business that we would have never had before. They are helping on a strategic level in building the right team and are really adding a lot of value.”

While international expansion and fast-paced growth is exciting, it hasn’t come without challenges.

Anthony says currency exchange risk can be difficult to navigate: there is pressure to consistently improve on each last range, and it has been tricky tackling Australia’s increasing labour costs.

Despite these things, however, Seafolly hasn’t strayed from its original philosophy and has stayed true to what is at the heart of all its operations. “I think we are all very passionate about our products and our brand. There is no room for cynicism. Anyone who comes in here loves Seafolly. That is really very important. My father really brought to the business passion for the product and for quality. Obviously, we are a lot bigger now than when my parents started it in 1975, but it is still a warm place to work, the people here are nice and decent and honest, and there is no room for egos. It is a fairly down-to-earth kind of an atmosphere.”

Anthony says he is incredibly proud of his “fantastic” workforce,

with some staff having been in the team for decades. “We have one person who has been here for 35 years, longer than me, and many who have been here for six, seven, eight, or 10 years. People either leave within the first six months of joining us or they never leave. The core group of people we have here is probably our greatest asset.”

As well as staff, Anthony says, relationships with suppliers are important. “They are everything to us. We have factories in China, and if they are not manufacturing good, quality product on time, then we are nothing. Our relationship with them is hugely important. We have an office in Hong Kong that supports them and spends time with them on a daily basis.”

With supermodel Gigi Hadid fronting the brand, and plans for further expansion, Seafolly looks set to continue its hold on the swim and beach lifestyle market in Australia and overseas. •

The Best Support

Parawin congratulates Seafolly on joining the family of L Capital Asia, the LVMH-sponsored private equity firm, and is proud to be one of their key vendors.

Parawin provides flexible solutions for quality women’s apparel products, and is an expert in swimwear for customers worldwide.

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