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# Living the Lifestyle

With 30 stores in Australia, one in the US, and an extensive online portal of products, Australian Sports Nutrition is filling a gap in the market for fitness enthusiasts.

Images courtesy of Australian Sports Nutrition

**S**imon Rees, founder and managing director of Australian Sports Nutrition (ASN), lives and breathes his profession. The entrepreneur started the successful sports supplement business in 2002, initially as a hobby with operations conducted from the spare bedroom at his home in Newcastle. He went on to open his first store on the Gold Coast a couple of years later and today has 30 shopfronts across the nation, one overseas, as well as a significant online presence.

ASN prides itself on offering a wide portfolio of high-quality sports and health supplements which are available at a competitive price and sold with the right advice. As the Australian consumer becomes more aware of and interested in the fitness

industry, and as the market sector grows, Simon says it pushes him further to stay true to his values and give back to the community that has been so good to him over the years.

“ASN practises what it preaches in this industry,” Simon says. “We are genuinely into the industry. We sponsor over 300 athletes, reaching all different forms of sport, so we give back a lot to the industry. My credit, my integrity, and my brand name are the most important things for me, and that’s what I’ve worked hard for. I think if you focus on that in business, your lifestyle and your financial situation are side effects of that.”

“We were first to market in Australia. If you’re passionate about what you’re doing and you’re truthfully attached to it, then I think your business

becomes a reflection of your personality. It’s amazing how similar it becomes.”

Simon started his working life in the construction industry, where he held various sales and management roles before leaving to follow his dreams. He was always involved in weight training on the side as a hobby and dabbled in competitive fitness, but decided he wanted to pursue a career in the lifestyle he loved so much via a start-up venture.

Back in the early 2000s, Simon says, it was difficult to get supplements when living in Australia. “It all had to come from the US, and that was back before the internet had taken off,” he recalls. “You had to ring up and order health and sports supplements to be sent by mail. I’ve always been fascinated with >

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supplements—how they help recovery and how they help you put on muscle.

“There was just no-one selling specialised sports supplements back then; they were all the way down in the back corner at the health food shop, and there was always someone working who didn’t really know much about them. So back then I started importing them myself from America.

“I secured a few accounts, and I used to sell quite a bit out of my spare bedroom while I still had my other job. It got bigger and bigger; the demand for sports supplements was there. Then I decided to open a little retail store with cheap rent and sell specialised sports supplements. I wanted to open the store on the Gold Coast because I enjoyed travelling there and I found it to be an image-conscious market. I thought it was the right place to open, and it exceeded all our expectations. Then as soon as I had money in the bank account from my first store, I thought I would open another one and then another, and soon enough I had 30 stores all doing very well. I always say that I could never go broke because I initially only put \$15,000 into it when I started and I’ve never borrowed a cent.”

After opening many more stores along the eastern seaboard with great success, ASN decided it was time to expand its operations further and launched its first shop in the US in mid July. Before its opening date, Simon was already hearing about further opportunities and was gaining recognition on an international level.

Most of ASN’s staff are fitness enthusiasts themselves, which gives the business a unique point of difference. Simon says it is important to always raise the bar when it comes to customer service. To achieve this, ASN has introduced monthly webinars for employees to learn about new products from suppliers, as well as regular visits from office managers



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- Simon Rees

to teach new sales skills. “Our primary focus is for return business. We want each customer to have an outstanding experience at ASN so they will come back and also tell their friends,” he adds.

Another element that makes ASN so competitive is its exclusively branded product range. When Simon noticed that there was a gap in the market for supplements made from honest ingredients, he decided it was time to build a manufacturing facility and release something new.

“Everybody else that has their supplement lines in Australia owns the formulas and they then get them contract-blended at places like dairy companies. I did that for years as well, but from doing that you don’t get the quality you want from them and you don’t get the raw materials. Most people would say, ‘Well, I don’t care as long as it tastes good.’ But I wasn’t happy with that, so then I went out and I built my own manufacturing facility and manufactured my own brand. I have control over the

raw materials, control over the quality, and I kept my integrity in the marketplace.

“There was a massive hole in the market because you can only manufacture certain strength products in Australia because of the standards here. So to tap into that more hardcore market—and there is a big slab of the market for products such as performance products, pre-workouts, stimulant-based energy products, testosterone boosters, and fat burners—that has to come from America.”

Simon made it a priority to travel over to the US, hand pick the ingredients he wanted, and import them so that he could manufacture something he could be proud of. It is this commitment that makes ASN a trusted name that stands out in the industry. “The rest of the competition is light years behind us in our professionalism, our store concept, and our product range,” he adds. “I think we are a standalone in the market for sure.”

While the company collaborates with a number of great Australian suppliers, Simon believes its strengths lie in the relationships it has developed overseas in America. “I think they make the strongest, most innovative sports supplements, obviously with a quantity I can buy from overseas,” he says. “I can ship it over here. I can even wholesale it to market because the price is so competitive. The American guys just seem so enthusiastic to help your business grow and jump through the necessary hoops to make that happen.”

Simon has successfully turned his hobby into a profitable business operation and is proud to say that he has taken full control of his own destiny. With every roadblock that has presented itself, the ASN team has pushed through and adapted to the market, coming out on top. “We’ve made our own way,” he states. “As a whole, I think that that’s our biggest achievement.

“If someone comes to the market tomorrow with a great groundbreaking, innovative product that everyone gets so excited about and I think, ‘Wow, this product is hurting my stores and my market,’ then I have the ability to come up with something smarter, better, and more innovative. I could have it designed and manufactured, with a sample on my shelf within 10 days, and then make up a label, a name, and launch it nationally in just a couple of months. I don’t think anyone else has the clout and the tools at their disposal to do that.

“I always say that I’m just so personally attached to the business—whether that’s going to be my downfall or not, I don’t know—but I am. I love my training, I love staying fit, and I love living the lifestyle myself. My supplements and my company are still a hobby for me. I have a good lifestyle, and if I can keep going down that road, then that’s my goal.”



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