

Opening the Door

Premium is focusing on customer service and quality to ensure growth into the future.

Images by Paolo Benini

A local Melbourne company since the beginning, Premium started small and has grown into a well-known supplier of custom wardrobes, showers, mirrors, and splashbacks. The company now has five showrooms across Victoria, and a growing number of staff to keep up with customer demand. With the company expanding, in February this year the owners of Premium brought on Simeon Hristovski as CEO. Simeon, an experienced leader and manager with a corporate background, came into Premium to take the business to its next level of development.

Simeon's career began 35 years ago, working at large corporate suppliers of products such as bricks, windows and doors. After 15 years, he moved into the aluminium supply industry,

which was how he fortuitously met the owners of Premium.

"Along that journey 16 years ago, I met the three owners of Premium," Simeon explains. "The company was a major customer of mine 16 years ago and remained a customer for the entire journey. I've gone from being a supplier to them to actually running their organisation. It's a nice link and a privilege." The three owners have now moved to non-executive director positions and continue their engagement with the business at board level.

Simeon was offered the role by the owners of Premium and decided to take the opportunity to shape the next stage of the company and put it in a position to capitalise on the potential for growth in the market.

Simeon's vision for Premium was to use his experience to tighten up

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- Simeon Hristovski

processes to be able to take the company forward. He could see there was a lot of potential in the company, and he wanted to be able to change things in order for the business to grow and expand. "I can summarise that by saying we're a good business, but we're not a great business. And the attraction from my point of view was to turn the good into great."

To do this and turn the company from good to great, Simeon says he had to focus on improving customer service and quality of products within the company and ensuring it was the best it could be. Simeon believes that the only way a company like Premium can survive is through having good relationships with its customers, and by understanding that the relationship with each customer is different. Premium supplies to a range of customers, from >



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individual retail customers, to small and medium builders, to large and commercial builders. What Simeon did was to alter the way the company dealt with each of these customers.

“What became very obvious to me was the fact that each of those streams requires a different level of customer service and a different level of detail. So that was one of the first things I set about doing—talking to all of our people and getting them to understand the customer was the most important person in our relationships and that each of them required different levels of customer service. We understand that customer satisfaction is all about personal choice, taste, style, and after-sales support.”

The key to this customer service, in Simeon’s view, is to ensure open and honest communication. He applies this not only to Premium’s relationships with its customers but also to the company’s relationships with suppliers. Many of Premium’s suppliers have been working with the company for more than 15 years, and Simeon prides himself on the openness of the partnerships. “Our relationships are long term, and we work with suppliers in an open and honest manner.

“I don’t hide anything at all from these guys; we have a very open platform. I think it’s about that open, honest working relationship, and sharing with them the plans of our growth and working so they have plenty of time to understand what our requirements are, to make sure they can support us as we take the next steps. It’s about working together.

“As a consequence, my focus in the first 12 months has been to have conversations with all people and divisions within the business, and reinforce the importance of quality products and systems, excellent customer service, and motivate committed employees.”

As well as developing new processes and ensuring customer and supplier relationships, Simeon has other big things in store for the company. Premium is expanding its product range into new areas.

“Remaining true to our core focus of providing products for the home, Premium will introduce a range of security products early in 2016,” Simeon adds. He sees this as a natural progression and expansion for the company, and is very excited about the upcoming possibilities for growth.

“There are a lot of things that we have on the go right now and quite a few surprises for our competitors. There are a lot of things we will be doing differently

in six months time that will assist the growth of the business.”

These changes, and other changes that Simeon has planned for Premium, have led to some challenges, however. There has been quite a lot of change since he became the CEO in February, which has made some staff uncomfortable. This, Simeon explains, is an understandable reaction, but one that needs to be managed to ensure his strategy is implemented. “People are hesitant and sometimes reluctant to change. How we manage and bring our people on the journey is critical to our success. That’s one of the things that we need to manage carefully: our people and their expectations on how and why we change.

“The other challenge is the market. When you embark on these projects, you actually need to get some market acceptance from your major customers. We are very fortunate to have the support of our customers in the fields that we are talking about expanding into. So it’s working with our people, our suppliers, and then in turn our customers. Getting these groups onboard assists with success.”

All these changes and plans for expansion come back to Simeon’s initial vision for Premium. He wants the company to continue to grow and expand, but also to be in a position where it is done in an ethical and honest way. He values the company’s reputation and won’t risk that for quick growth.

Ultimately, Simeon believes, with the expansion of its products, excellent customer service, and quality products, and a company culture that treats employees well, Premium will continue to grow and set itself apart from its competitors in the marketplace. “I think our point of difference is our committed and motivated employees supporting the growth plans in each of the company’s primary market segments of retail, builder, multi-res, and commercial,” Simeon explains. •



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