

# Datacom continues growth despite GFC



★ 2010  
RISING  
STARS

Concerted investment in people has helped Rising Stars award winner Datacom Systems WA maintain strong growth despite challenging market conditions.

Adam Orlando  
6-PAGE  
SPECIAL REPORT

IF anything is troubling Datacom Systems WA managing director Basil Lenzo, it's that the West Leederville-based professional IT infrastructure and services firm could be growing too rapidly.

In three years, Datacom's turnover has grown 487 per cent, with a further 40 per cent growth forecast for 2010-11.

"It is growing too fast, to be honest," Mr Lenzo told *WA Business News*.

"It's something I'm conscious of, however we've now built a structure that will enable the business to manage that growth.

"We had to change our structure given the massive growth that we have had, now there's a lot more accountability back to the business divisions, which are all being run by a general manager."

The recent growth of Datacom Systems follows the firm's success in 2007-08, when it was selected as one of WA's top 10 Rising Stars, with special recognition for being the youngest company in the top 10.

The Rising Stars program was initiated by *WA Business News* in 2003 to celebrate the success of fast-growing privately owned WA businesses.

Over the years, the awards have celebrated up-and-coming local businesses such as inaugural winner Gatecrasher, IT firm Empired in 2004, West Perth-based Thinksmart in 2006, and 2009 winners Specialising Broking Associates and Anchor Foods.

By meeting a list of criteria such as company fiscal performance, past and present growth potential, and strategic capability and communication initiatives, Datacom has been selected from this year's entrants to place first in the Rising Stars Awards.

"From our perspective we were very privileged to be nominated the first time and getting to the top three," Mr Lenzo said.

"However, it also took a lot of work and a lot of passion from the three directors [Mr Lenzo, David Cameron and Peter Giannas] and the broader business and the people within the business to get to



**FOUNDATION:** Basil Lenzo (right), David Cameron (centre) and Peter Giannas are confident Datacom Systems has built a structure that will enable it to cope with rapid growth. **Photo:** Grant Currall

that point. The past 12 months for us has seen massive growth and we've invested in some really good people.

"All of our people are really good, but we've invested in some skill sets that have really enabled us to grow and win some really significant business around WA."

Mr Lenzo said the core difference contributing to the firm's growth this year is Datacom's internal systems and structures, which were a lot smoother.

"Our processes are a lot cleaner, our people are a lot more engaged and we have a development plan and a progression plan where they need to go," he said.

The business worked hard in the past year to improve accountability among the 55 staff and upper management, by developing autonomous business units with general managers who have their own budget.

"We worked hard this year at the budget process at driving KPIs top down," Mr Lenzo said.

"Each business unit is now managed in its own right by a general manager and they have a budget and operational control.

"We cascaded the top-level strategy down to each business unit, and

## DATACOM

**Datacom Systems WA**

- ★ Datacom Systems WA is part of the national Datacom group
- ★ Established 2007 (WA)
- ★ 55 staff
- ★ Turnover growth 487% since 2007-08

then they with their teams formulated the business strategy and then what they did was, they spoke to each individual whose KPIs are to tie into the business unit strategy.

"We have alignment with individual KPIs to the business strategy so each employee now knows that everything they are driving to and for is aligned to their business unit growth and that business unit growth is aligned to the overall business growth.

"Everyone is absolutely accountable for the result at hand."

Mr Lenzo said with the new internal structures in place, Datacom would continue to proactively look

at further acquisitions after recently acquiring Perth data centre Metro iX for \$10 million.

He said the acquisition would contribute to the projected growth of Datacom in the next financial year and was estimated to give the firm an extra \$6 million to its top line.

Mr Lenzo said the firm was bullish on the forecasted growth, despite the impact of the global economic crisis, because Datacom used the downturn to "take a breath".

"I think if you speak to business people in Perth, that period as much as it was painful, in terms of forecasting it actually enabled us to just

take a bit of a breath, review our systems, processes, review the people, review clients, and enabled us to get back on focussing on what we are good at," he said.

"The reality is it did enable us at a management level to go and have a quick look inside the business and focus on working in it, rather than on it.

"The first few months we really saw the impact across the numbers, the morale of staff, and there was overall concern in particular because it was everywhere.

"The reality is, when you look at commercial numbers it did impact us slightly but not as much as we initially thought it may and we ended up having growth on our top number.

"When you're growing rapidly you tend to try and guess ahead of the curve and when that curve stops you have take a step back and just look at the business model and look at the areas that we were trying to get into and realise that it wasn't core.

"So we then trimmed that off." Datacom was forced to make three positions redundant as it went back to focusing on what its core business is, which is around infrastructure and projects.

# Confidence remains the key for HHG



Emily Morgan  
6-PAGE  
SPECIAL REPORT

THERE is an air of confidence around HHG Legal director Simon Creek.

That confidence is understandable for the director of a law firm which has grown from six to 70 staff in only seven years, has lifted turnover by 133 per cent in his time with the business, and has moved from Albany to its new home in West Perth.

Mr Creek moved to Albany when he was asked to restore and introduce innovation to the practice of an established law firm and competitor to Hudson Henning and Goodman, who was only too happy to sell the firm.

“I went down in 2000 at 26 and became a partner in that firm, for four

years I was in over my head. I grew that from three to 21. The commercial lesson at that point was no matter how hard you work to fix something that is terminally ill, bandaids will only go so far,” Mr Creek says of the roadblocks they faced in renovating the culture of a well-established firm.

Frustrated by the limitations to the growth of the other firm, Messrs Creek and Thornhill approached the owner of Hudson Henning and Goodman, who was only too happy to sell the firm.

“When he was given the chance to sell it to two young guns, he couldn’t have been happier,” Mr Creek told *WA Business News*.

From there, the business partners set about creating change in the ways HHG operated.

“The place was a shambles in every way you could imagine. It had a strong enough batch of loyal clients who as soon as they saw reinvigoration, flooded back. And that is the only catalyst we needed,” Mr Creek says.

“We set about from day dot, refusing to limit what could happen.”


Mr Creek says HHG’s approach to putting clients as the number one priority is the firm’s point of difference.

He says the most important aspect of client interaction is to encourage an understanding of the law among the firm’s clientele, and “encouraging them to work with us so they were satisfied they were getting value for money”.

“It was fairly basic stuff by that point in many other professions and aspects of commerce, but quite radical in the law,” Mr Creek says.



**LEGAL TEAM:** Simon Creek (right), Murray Thornhill (left), and partner Steven Heathcote aim to expand HHG Legal into workplace relations and employment law. **Photo: Grant Currall**



**HHG**

- ★ Law firm servicing range of clients from multinational corporations to high-net worth individuals
- ★ Established 1919, bought by Simon Creek and Murray Thornhill 2003
- ★ 65 staff
- ★ Turnover growth 133% since 2006-07

“That has permeated right the way through and has led to huge growth.”

He says putting clients and the fundamental goal of law – helping people – has been instrumental in the firm being one of the fastest growing in WA.

“We’ve always intrinsically

believed that if we are good at what we do, that if we look after clients to the highest level, if we are kind and generous to our staff, incidentally along the way, we will make a dollar out of it,” Mr Creek said.

“At the end of the day, what you are doing is using a lot of knowledge and hopefully a lot of skill,

to actually help people. When law firms forget that, they deserve all of the jokes that are out there about the profession.”

Messrs Creek and Thornhill aim to increase the company’s staff to 100, expanding its services into workplace relations and employment law.

## Changing environmental views timely for Outback Ecology

■ Sophie Knowles

ENVIRONMENTAL consultancy Outback Ecology was founded in 1990 with the aim of introducing environmental reform to the mining industry.


The company’s success can be measured by its client base, which numbers 90 and includes some of the world’s biggest mining companies, including BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto, Chevron, Atlas Iron, Newmont, and Kalgoorlie Consolidated Gold Mines.

Founded by Harley Lacy and incorporated in 1996, Outback now employs 42 professional science staff and six support staff. The company has eight semi-autonomous strategic business units, or service groups.

Areas of expertise include: mine closure and closure systems; soils, tailings and landforms; environmental approvals and impact assessment; environmental management, compliance and audit; rehabilitation monitoring and completion; aquatic ecology; flora; and fauna.

A consistently high level of environmental concern, which has been raised by the mining industry and society as a whole is, according to Mr Lacy, responsible for the company’s success.

“The evolving concern about envi-



**Outback Ecology**

- ★ Environmental consultancy service providing applicable sciences for the mining industry
- ★ Established in 1990
- ★ Founded by managing director Harley Lacy
- ★ 48 staff
- ★ Annual compound growth in excess of 25% from 2006-2009

ronmental impact by society at large and the positive response by the mining industry across Australia to that concern has coincided with our development and growth. We have indeed been in the right place at the right time,” he said.

Mr Lacy observed an urgent need for environmental reform in the mining industry during his early 20s when he worked on the Yeelirrie trial mine.

He noticed the mine sites were very dusty, often polluted, with high

volumes of rubbish and associated problems.

It was to one such mine site, Dominion Mining, developed 10 miles from Mr Lacy’s homestead in Meekatharra, that he approached the manager and offered a measure of environmental consultation.

“They had little or no help to address environmental issues,” he said.

“When I approached the mine manager at the Meekatharra site, David Milton, in 1990, to start working on these environmental matters, they allowed me to start research work focused on rehabilitation of the waste landforms, and Outback Ecology started.”

Outback has evolved a unique internal funding model with minimal external borrowings, whereby 50 per cent of annual profits available for distribution are retained in the business as ‘deferred distribution’ to fund growth. It expects a 20 per cent compound growth per annum over the next five years and has a cash reserve of more than \$1 million.

“We were and are funded by internal investment by myself predominantly, and future growth will be funded by our model of investment by the owners themselves,” Mr Lacy said.



**AWARE:** Harley Lacy says a consistently high level of environmental concern has led to Outback Ecology’s success. **Photo: Grant Currall**

“The board will decide – if this model is to be supplemented as we develop, and as we need to address capital requirements.”

New owners will be incorporated into the company after an employee ownership scheme commences from July 1 to transfer ownership from the managing director to employ-

ees that have worked for outback for two or more years.

Mr Lacy said the new ownership scheme would act to support the sustainability of a the company, retain the best staff as owners, and establish people with a stake in their own future to succeed him and the other senior people over time.

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## ★ RISING STARS |

# Want Building Solutions?



Dan Wilkie  
6-PAGE  
SPECIAL REPORT

THE Building Solutions journey began in December 2004 as a business idea shared between two friends.

Despite having no previous experience running their own construction business, an accountant, David Guille, and a registered builder, Marcus Kotsoglo, decided to pursue their dream of establishing a successful building and construction firm.

Through working regular 60 to 70-hour weeks, Messrs Guille and Kotsoglo were able to create a business that, since its inception, has never borrowed funds for working capital.

The rest, as the saying goes, is history, and Building Solutions is currently working on more than 20 projects across Western Australia, employing 20 full-time workers directly, and indirectly employing more than 150 sub-contractors and suppliers.

The firm offers a full scope of construction and design services: from managing building and environmental approvals; fit-outs of new and existing premises; coordinating developments and investments; to designing and constructing industrial, commercial, government, health and mixed-use residential projects.

It also has the convenience of drawing on the town planning expertise of sister firm Planning Solutions Australia.

Although the organisation is relatively small, it employs a highly skilled and specialised team of contractors, so can handle a diverse range of projects from simple office fit-outs to multi-storey buildings.

The quality of the team can be reflected in the fact that Building Solutions rarely seeks public tenders from subcontractors, yet has still been able to compete on price and guarantee a quality product.

It didn't take long for the firm to make some real noise in Western Australia's building industry, as it won a Master Builders of Australia certificate of excel-

### BUILDING SOLUTIONS

#### Building Solutions

- ★ Multi-million dollar commercial builder offering design, project management and construction services
- ★ Year Established: 2005
- ★ 20 staff
- ★ Turnover growth 308% since 2006-07

lence within its first two years. More recently, Building Solutions received the MBA's John Roberts Award as the best new commercial builder in WA for 2009.

Not even the global financial crisis seemed to slow Building Solutions down; rather the directors used it to develop new capabilities within the business.

A slowdown in private sector construction during the crisis resulted in Building Solutions registering to complete government projects.

The firm is currently building libraries and covered assembly areas for eight WA primary schools as part of the federal government's Building the Education Revolution.

To facilitate further growth, the directors are now focusing on the company's corporate structure and the development of effective and efficient systems and processes.

Building Solutions' specific growth strategy is married to the concept that positive growth drives value creation, but doesn't assume that all growth creates value. As a result, Building Solutions is mindful to take on projects that are suitable for its capabilities.

# Boom beckons Land Surveys

■ Russell Quinn

ONE of Western Australia's fastest-growing surveying companies has successfully navigated through the economic downturn, increasing its annual turnover by almost 375 per cent and tripling its staffing levels in recent years.

Belmont-based Land Surveys has experienced significant growth since it was established in 1997.

The business has more than 50 qualified specialist surveyors involved with major clients including Thiess, Leighton and Decmil working on projects ranging from large-scale site preparation for a new liquefied natural gas plant, to numerous multi-storey buildings and rail developments.

In the 2006-07 financial year, Land Surveys had 33 staff on its books and a positive outlook.

The following year turnover had leapt about 145 per cent and during FY09, the company's turnover jumped almost 94 per cent.

That's an increase in turnover of about 375 per cent during the past few years, and Land Surveys has forecast that figure to grow by about 17 per cent this financial year.

At the same time the company increased employee numbers by 60 per cent from FY07 to FY08, growing from 33 to 53 staff members, and again the following year, growing by about 56 per cent to 83 by the end of financial year 2009.

Land Surveys managing director Peter Rullo suggested that further growth was on the cards in light of the state's impending boom.

"We are currently implementing processes and strategies which will enable us to operate with a proactive approach in time for the next coming boom," Mr Rullo said.

He said Land Surveys had recognised a gap in the market for precision surveying with the introduction of prefabricated steel work and concrete panels, amid the shift from traditional surveying methods used by building companies (where surveyors were engaged to simply mark out the boundaries of a property) to

### Land Surveys

#### Land Surveys

- ★ Provides land and engineering surveying services for the building, construction and mining industries
- ★ Founded: September 1997
- ★ 83 staff 08-09
- ★ Turnover growth 375% 2006-07 to 2008-09

more accurate onsite surveying services.

"After spending the early years establishing and securing our market position, we began to find our niche and differentiate ourselves from our competitors by offering a unique service," Mr Rullo said.

"Land Surveys developed a comprehensive surveying solution with complete project management, human resource and administration support included.

"This set us apart ... and started us on the path to growth."

In order to cater for future demand, the company said it had recognised the inevitable skills shortage arising as a result of the next commodity boom and, as such, had established a number of recruitment processes to overcome this obstacle.

Mr Rullo said the expansion of recruitment efforts across Australia and New Zealand, and partnerships with universities in both countries, was a cornerstone to future growth in anticipation of the high volume of north-west projects to commence in coming years.

He said Land Surveys would establish recruitment offices in NSW, Victoria and New Zealand in an attempt to secure the top graduates from Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and the University of Otago.

# Peard leads by example



Dan Wilkie  
6-PAGE  
SPECIAL REPORT



## Peard

- ★ Peard Real Estate Group provides “stress free” transactions for clients buying, selling or renting residential property.
- ★ Year Established: 1997
- ★ 177 staff
- ★ Turnover growth 64.8 % since 2006-07

IN just over a decade in the market, Peard Real Estate Group has established itself as one of Perth’s most successful locally owned and operated real estate groups.

According to Real Estate Institute of Western Australia statistics, four of the top 10 real estate offices in WA ranked by listings sold in April 2010 were agencies under the Peard umbrella.

Last financial year the Peard Group sold 1,704 properties at an average of nearly \$2.5 million in sales each day, taking its average sale price to \$509,375.

It has also grown its staff from three in its original Hillarys office in 1997 to 177 across 10 offices this year.

Along the way, the group also established Evolutions Home Loans in 2004 and Evolution Settlements in 2006 to provide financial services to complement the core real estate business.

Evolutions Home Loans provides finance through more than 25 lenders in the Australian Finance Group.

Part of the group’s success has been its commitment to innovation. In 1997, Peter Peard opened the first office at Hillarys under his vision for a singularly owned real estate organisation rather than the franchised model traditionally popular in WA.

Today, the company’s nine branch offices are each 51 per cent owned by the Peard Group and 49 per cent owned by shareholders within that office.

Marketing and administration is centralised at a corporate head office to allow for standard systems and processes throughout the group.

This structure has strengthened the Peard brand and simplified everyday processes and operations for employees.

The firm’s commitment to innovative marketing practices has also become a point of difference for Peard.

In 2002, coinciding with the opening of the group’s

second office, Peard Cox Mindarie, Peard produced *Peard Property Magazine*, the first of its kind in WA.

The following year, Peard launched its first property gallery at the Hillarys office, implementing interactive touch screen programs and plasma screen displays, which were also a WA first.

Peard were also the first real estate agency in Australia to produce an iPhone application to advertise its listings.

At street level, the Peard Group has demonstrated it will push the boundaries in order to get its properties noticed.

Peard research shows street signage accounts for more than 20 per cent of buyer inquiries for properties that are listed with the group.

Peard was the first real estate agency in Perth to introduce doubled-sided street signs and curved signs, and last month announced it had developed a new premium sign to market properties priced above \$800,000, which feature a prominent metallic strip to reflect sunlight and draw the attention of passing motorists.

On the back of its marketing initiatives and corporate structures, Peard Real Estate Group is confident it will continue to grow its brand alongside market and industry trends.

# Cleanskin Cellars on track

■ Russell Quinn

WESTERN Australia’s first liquor store franchise has achieved considerable growth since opening five years ago, after initially attracting fierce opposition from the sector’s bigger players.

WA Cleanskin Cellars was started in 2004 by husband and wife, Steve and Marie Cloughley, to provide high quality, value for money wines in WA, while supporting local wine producers in difficult times such as the current wine glut.

“Our company sells premium wine that does not bear the producers details, thus allowing for the consumer to buy at a lower price while also helping wineries sell their product as ‘cleanskin wines’ so as to limit and avoid dilution of the wineries’ existing brands,” Mr Cloughley said.

He said the opening of the first and second stores in Subiaco and Claremont led to lengthy and costly court battles in the Liquor Licensing Court, and subsequently, the WA Supreme Court of Appeal.

The couple spent about \$500,000 in legal fees fighting the cases in both courts.

“The company had to negate objections from retail giants and the Liquor Stores Association, which rallied together to stop new competition entering the market,” Mr Cloughley said.

“The second store in Claremont ended in the WA Supreme Court of Appeal where Chief Justice Wayne Martin and two other appeal judges ruled in favour of WA Cleanskin Cellars and identified the cleanskin wine concept store as a unique offering in the liquor industry.

“As a young business we have experienced the ugly side of business, when your competitors attempt to use unjust and archaic laws together with their financial might to stop you in your tracks before you even get off the ground.”

Overcoming such a turbulent beginning has spurred the company to progress its operations.

In recent years, WA Cleanskin Cellars has grown its annual turnover by more than 130 per cent and tripled staff numbers.



## WA Cleanskin Cellars

- ★ Specialist liquor wholesaler and retailer dedicated to cleanskin wines
- ★ Founded: December 2004
- ★ 20 staff 08-09
- ★ Turnover growth 137% 2006-07 to 2008-09

Between FY07 and FY08, turnover grew by more than 90 per cent, and by 23 per cent the following year with the company predicting turnover to increase more than 20 per cent by the end of this financial year.

The company now operates seven retail outlets throughout WA with four company owned stores (Subiaco, Claremont, Armadale and Malaga) and three franchise outlets (Kingsley, Busselton and Doubleview).

“We are the first liquor store franchise in WA and the first to be approved by the Department of Racing, Gaming and Liquor,” Mr Cloughley said.

“There are approximately five new franchise store applications being prepared for submission ... strategically located across country and metropolitan regions.”

The company also wholesales wine to other liquor stores, restaurants and corporate clients.

“The addition of a not-for-profit division within the company, whereby WA Cleanskin Cellars sells wines to organisation members and donates part proceeds to help in fundraising efforts, is not only unique within the liquor industry but it highlights our dedication to the wider West Australian community,” Mr Cloughley said.



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## ★ RISING STARS |

# Averna enjoys rapid rise



Dan Wilkie  
6-PAGE  
SPECIAL REPORT

BOUTIQUE homebuilder Averna Homes has made an almost-instant impact on Western Australia's residential building sector since its inception in 2007.

Averna Homes started with four staff in August 2007, with managing director Paul Serra working out of a garage-turned-office. Six months later, the first Averna Homes showcase house was built.

"We wanted to show a unique product and we wanted to show our workmanship," Mr Serra said.

"We signed up between 15 and 20 clients from that single-storey home."

According to Mr Serra, the company's showcase homes are specifically designed as a starting point for clients to experience design possibilities for their own homes.

Averna Homes' strategy is to provide a point of difference from other builders by placing primary emphasis on workmanship and finish, luxury specifications and competitive pricing.

The company intends to produce at least one show home each year to diversify its product base and explore innovative design concepts.

Mr Serra said the success of the first showcase home affirmed his belief that Averna Homes could become a dynamic force in the boutique homes market.

Within 18 months of being established, Averna Homes was named the Master Builder's Association's best new builder for 2009.

Mr Serra attributes the company's rise up the industry ladder to its strategy of building a predetermined number of homes each year, which ensures the highest quality of product and service.

"By prescribing the upper limit of homes built, ample resources are available to be allocated to each of our clients as necessary to ensure the best possible finished product and personalised customer service," Mr Serra said.

Averna sold 10 homes its first year, 20 the next, and

**Averna Homes**

- ★ Luxury homebuilder providing individually-designed homes ranging from \$400,000-\$700,000
- ★ 16 staff
- ★ Established 2007
- ★ Turnover growth 427% since 2007-08

has forecast it will meet its goal of 40 new home sales during calendar 2010.

The commitment to a personalised quality build has allowed Averna Homes to grow, despite the property sector being hit hard by the global financial crisis.

"We haven't had the best market for the last few years, and when we set up, it certainly wasn't a boom," Mr Serra said.

"We probably set up in the toughest period, but I suppose the success has come down to the total dedication that we give to our clients, and servicing them.

"You're not there to take advantage, you're there to build their home, give them the best price and give them the best service. Service, really, is my key attribute that I feel that we are there for our clients, they can call us anytime."

Mr Serra's next aim is to establish Averna Homes as a household brand, where all its work comes from referrals.

Mr Serra said Averna Homes' target market was second and third homebuyers seeking luxury houses priced between \$400,000 and \$700,000.

"This market is considered to be less susceptible to interest rate fluctuations and price is not the only consideration in their selection of a builder," he said.

# Chooks' strategy a winner

■ Adam Orlando

THE Chooks Fresh & Tasty concept began with 'chief chook' Steve Hansen, who started out in franchising 27 years ago when he invested in a Chicken World business with his father-in-law, Colin Manuel.

In 1991, both men decided to become franchisors of their own system and created River Rooster, starting with two stores, in Busselton and Margaret River.

Five years after successfully launching the chicken franchise, Mr Hansen bought-out Mr Manuel and took on the role of managing director.

After seven years of growth, River Rooster in 2003 underwent a rebranding process to become Chooks Fresh & Tasty, a franchise system Mr Hansen said was unashamedly promoted as a low-cost operator that carefully examined "the most efficient and cost-effective way of doing everything".

"Our aim is to provide quality barbecued and fried chicken products at affordable prices," the franchise says on its website.

"Consequently you are more likely to find us paying reasonable rents in local shopping centres than in high rent stand-alone stores on main roads.

"The reason is simple. The average break-even cost of operating our stores is deliberately kept low in order to offer the best quality products at more competitive prices.

"This philosophy has saved our franchisees a small fortune in the past and it is an integral part of our culture.

"We are a country company that has come to the city, rather than the other way around, and we prefer to find practical solutions to any situation."

Since the rebranding, Chooks' profit and growth has increased steadily, with the number of stores growing from 15 in 2003 to 40 in 2010.

There are now 34 stores in WA, five outlets in Queensland and one in Tasmania.

**CHOOKS**  
fresh & tasty

**Chooks Fresh & Tasty**

- ★ Chooks is a growing chicken franchise with 40 outlets in WA, Qld and Tasmania.
- ★ Established 2003
- ★ 7 staff
- ★ Turnover growth 38% since 2006-07

Turnover has grown almost 40 per cent since 2006-07.

Mr Hansen attributes the growth and success of Chooks to its low-cost franchise model, as well as its clearly defined business strategy.

The strategy focuses on obtaining space in small community centres or small neighbourhood shopping complexes, to minimise overheads and maximise profit.

These locations, which must be fixed, have low rent and high foot traffic, are only taken after the franchise undertakes extensive market research to ensure any store will be sustainable.

Chooks has very strong processes and systems in place to ensure growth and consistency across the group.

Mr Hansen believes it is important to offer customers the same level of service, the same taste and quality of product in every store it opens.

To that end, Chooks has invested heavily into the corporate image, systems, marketing, and brand development to ensure each outlet is capable of sustaining further growth and brand recognition.

# Marble gets the job done

Emily Morgan  
6-PAGE  
SPECIAL REPORT

THE recruitment industry may have felt the effects of the global economic downturn more than most, as evidenced by the number of local businesses to fold in the past year, but Marble Group presents a different story.

Not only did the Subiaco-based business survive the GFC, it recorded growth during the period.

Marble Group owners and directors, Lee Corbitt and Gary Denton, say their strategies of unearthing new markets, maintaining development, inspiring staff and investing in the company's infrastructure has been instrumental in the firm coming through the GFC.

They also focussed on developing relationships with prominent clients in their specialist industries.

"The state of the labour market over recent times has meant that it's never been more important to become fully immersed in our specialist markets," Mr Corbitt says.

"The past 12 months have been spent laying the foundations for many years of sustained growth."

Of all the strategies the company used to sustain its growth there was one that Mr Corbitt says was integral to Marble Group being successful in the downturn.

"The single biggest factor in achieving growth is maintaining the morale of your staff. Our willingness to openly communicate and support our people through the uncertainty of the past 12-18 months has been vital," he says.

The formula seems to have worked. Marble Group's turnover is forecast to grow 11 per cent this financial year. Staff numbers are another reflection of growth in the business.

Marble Group started out as a two-man show in 2006, with 26 staff now employed across the two Marble Group offices, in Perth and Sydney.

The company's success formula is simple.



## Marble Group

- ★ Talent search/recruitment specialising in commercial business, civil construction, property and architecture
- ★ Established 2006
- ★ 26 staff
- ★ Turnover growth 385% since 2006-07

"Recruitment itself is not a unique product or service but it is the thoroughness of delivery and an extremely consultative approach to our dealings that has enabled us to grow so rapidly," Mr Corbitt says.

"As a people business, our reputation is everything. The way in which we are perceived is directly determined by the quality and integrity of our consultants.

"Another example of strategy has been the structured communication between our business leaders and our clients. Weekly phone calls are made to each client that has been visited by a consultant for the week.

"This not only provides valuable insight in to our consultants' performance, but also demonstrates a commitment to the relationship and opens the lines of communication between management and our clients.

"Commitment to growth for us meant putting our money where our mouth is and we've invested heavily in several key projects that will move our business from a start up structure to a scalable, flexible model for the future."

## JUDGES 2010 RISING STARS

**Gavin Ball**  
GAVIN Ball is a small business entrepreneur who operates businesses through his Vorian Investment Group. The businesses in the group include, among others, Pretzos Retail (13 stores) and Star3 Media, a web, design and marketing business.



**Mark Greenwood**  
MARK Greenwood joined Bankwest in 2001, taking up his current role as state manager commercial banking WA in March 2008. He is a career banker who has spent most of his professional life in corporate and commercial banking roles.



**Ron Cacioppe**  
RON Cacioppe is a managing director, executive coach and senior consultant with more than 25 years' experience in leadership and team development programs. He teaches at Murdoch University in the MBA program and is an adjunct professor at Curtin University.



**William Meston**  
BILLY Meston is a partner at Pricewaterhouse-Coopers and leads the private client assurance practice in WA. PwC is the largest professional services firm in the world. His areas of expertise include external and internal audit, due diligence, consulting, and accounting assistance.



**Suna Cavanagh**  
Suna Cavanagh is the director of events at WA Business News. She has considerable experience in finance and most recently came to WA Business News from Westpac, where she was the regional manager for its consumer financial planning business.



**Patrick Thuang**  
PATRICK Thuang is a partner in the property services group at Lavan Legal, WA's largest independently owned law firm. He has experience in property and commercial law, including the acquisition, development and leasing of major CBD properties, and shopping centres.



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