

A big box of ideas

A new way of thinking, coupled with a new sense of direction, has helped fuel consistent growth for Industrial Gaskets.

BY KATE NASH



SAs Defence industry played a pivotal role in the turnaround of a gasket and sealing company at Melrose Park when two female employees took over its direction two years ago.

The pair – Trudy Manhire and Michelle Wolanin – are now part-owners in Industrial Gaskets, with Defence accounting for 30 per cent of its work and earmarked to eventually provide 50 per cent of the company's business.

Defence has played a significant role in the successful turnaround of the company – which once concentrated on supplying the whitegoods and car markets with die-cut components, and now focuses on the Defence, Oil and Gas, Pipeline and Mining industries.

The women were quick to identify technology which offered the shake-up the company needed. Given free reign three years ago, they replaced salespeople on the road with newer forms of technology. They produced a website they could manage easily themselves and concentrated on improving the company's branding and marketing to increase its exposure to existing and potential customers.

"We came in with a big box of ideas and just kept rolling with them. They've paid off in a big way," Trudy said.

The results exceeded all expectations, delivering happier staff and an expanded product range, reflected in a much-improved bottom line. The company's turnover and growth is increasing every year.

"We're now attracting new customers, recognized businesses and major projects," Michelle, a qualified accountant, said.

"When we began we were forecasting about 5 per cent increase in new customers in a financial year. We are now achieving 15 per cent new customers a year and 40 per cent of our work is through referrals. Last financial year we exceeded our customer growth and it continues to increase.

"We also wanted to introduce new products. Some of those new products now exceed our core products."

Improved marketing had also been a boon for the company.

"Customers and Prime companies in Defence are now contacting us. They're aware of our quick turnaround times, our expertise and the high quality of our products," she said.

Trudy said the company, formed in 1985, got its first opportunity to supply their products to a major Defence Prime in 2004.

"From there it's blossomed. Through the addition of staff and streamlined manufacturing processes, we now deal with about 12 Defence companies including a major prime company, through which we export our product to Malaysia," she said.

The DTC had been invaluable in helping the women market the company to the defence industry.

"It's good exposure for the business, and gives us invaluable opportunities," Trudy said.

"We are kept informed of areas of supply that we weren't aware

existed and get regular updates on potential new projects. It's important to have the networking and marketing in place. Unfortunately, there's nothing like the DTC in the oil and gas industry."

Industrial Gaskets, which supplies to air, land and sea Defence projects, enjoys the diversity and challenges in working with Defence.

"We have recognised that long lead times can be associated with the gasketing industry and we have worked hard to ensure that our lead times are minimal," Michelle said.

"Fortunately, word is getting out that we offer quick turnaround together with competitive pricing, without compromising the quality of our products."

The company's oil and gas work has given it experience in dealing with lead times and the high quality of product expected.

The implementation of improved systems and capital investment of its digital cutting machine has increased the capabilities of Industrial Gaskets to cater well for Defence.

"Nothing in Defence is standard size but our revamping of the business enables us to accommodate Defence needs and a greater volume of work," Michelle said.

"We are flexible in our production processes including overtime shifts and employment of additional staff to cater for our customers' requirements, – another indicator to us of the rate at which we're growing."

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Trudy Manhire and Michelle Wolanin, Industrial Gaskets

