

extra miles FOR TILES

GROUTPRO PROVES A LITTLE RESTORATION GOES A LONG WAY TOWARDS BIG PROFITS

➔ Former builder and real estate agent Murray Rhodes was sitting on a yacht somewhere between the Galapagos and Marquesas islands when he decided he needed to find a new way of using his experience. 'The reason I was on the boat was not because I'd made my fortune but because there was no work for me in the Bay of Plenty,' he smiles ruefully. 'That's why a friend and I took a yacht delivery job across the Pacific.'

After spending the majority of his working life in self-employment, Murray was quite clear that he wanted his own business again but it had to be something with real prospects. 'Obviously the voyage brought me luck,' he says, 'because almost as soon as I got back to Tauranga I found GroutPro. I knew I could do the work, I could see the franchise had enormous potential and, best of all, it was only the same kind of entry cost as getting into a lawn-mowing round.'

GroutPro specialises in grout and tile restoration as well as after-installation tile care and is the only franchise of its kind in the country. The business was founded by Joe Hesmondhalgh and Rob Howard, and since its launch in mid-2009 has become an instant success for both customers and franchisees. 'In the USA and Australia, tile care is a billion-dollar industry,' explains Rob, 'but until GroutPro came along nobody was specialising in it in New Zealand. If you don't seal grout properly it becomes dirty, stained and bacteria-laden. Tilers don't like doing the job as it means returning after the grout has cured, so they frequently don't inform customers or just suggest a DIY grout sealer. The end result is a heap of bad news for Kiwi home owners but a wealth of work for GroutPro franchisees such as Murray.'

POPULAR SERVICE, AFFORDABLE PRICE

The GroutPro colourseal process not only cleans and rejuvenates tired old grout but actually re-colours it to look like new and then seals it so it will not stain again. 'As a result,' says Rob, 'we have had an almost 100% quote acceptance rate. We set up a pilot operation in Palmerston North

THE CAMERA CAN'T KEEP UP - THERE ARE NOW 31 GROUTPRO FRANCHISEES WITH DEMAND FOR MORE IN MANY AREAS THROUGHOUT NEW ZEALAND



BUILDING AND REAL ESTATE MIGHT BE QUIET, BUT MURRAY RHODES TURNED HIS EXPERIENCE TO HIS ADVANTAGE WHEN HE INVESTED IN A GROUTPRO FRANCHISE

where there were around 30 full-time tilers – none of whom were doing any after-care work. That proved the demand and enabled us to develop the model and training systems. Now franchisees are able to achieve over 90% profit margins and make a very good living.'

GroutPro already has 31 franchisees around the country and is still seeking suitable franchisees in most areas. 'The entry cost is just \$24,950+gst so this is an opportunity to get into something big at an early stage,' says Joe. 'If you're quite practical and like talking to people, it's not a hard business to operate and it's easy to find customers.'

NOTHING BUT HAPPY CUSTOMERS

Murray speaks very highly of the GroutPro training he received. 'It enables you to start work straight away. Rob does a fantastic job on the technical side, and the benefit of having someone like Joe to develop your marketing skills is enormous. The only intimidating part of becoming a franchisee was actually doing my first job, but I soon had complete confidence in the system.' And the support doesn't end after training, either. 'On top of the help I get from Joe and Rob, we have an awesome intranet,' he says. 'It enables all the franchisees to post questions and have them answered from the experience of the others. We have now got a huge database of jobs that means we can cover virtually any issue – that's a big help and ensures our clients get first class service, too.'

Murray says that the franchise is achieving all the goals he set himself on his Pacific voyage. 'I've always believed that to succeed in business you need to exceed your customer's expectations and the GroutPro process makes that easy. Many people just live with dirty, sad-looking tiles in bathrooms or kitchens and generally don't believe anything can be done about them, so when they see the difference GroutPro can make they are stoked. The process is actually a restoration job and not only does grout come up like new but it is *much* easier to clean later on. At four to five hundred bucks for GroutPro, as opposed to a couple of thousand or more for a new tiling job, it makes a great deal of economic sense.

'In fact, I've had nothing but happy customers since I started six months ago and of course people are telling their friends and showing them the results. I've started getting more and more referrals and we're also getting a huge amount of work through tilers. At this rate, in six to eight months there won't be any need to advertise at all. Would I do it again? Without a doubt!' ■

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