

finding their DREAM BUSINESS

EX-BANKERS MOVE OUT OF THE CORPORATE WORLD INTO KITCHEN INSTALLATION

⇒ A former Westpac business adviser, Sharon St.Clair-Newman jokes that her most difficult customer was herself. Sharon and partner David Fleming, also a career banker, had decided to leave the corporate life in Dunedin for self-employment in Queenstown. But what could they do?

Their brief to themselves was that their business must be in an area of mutual interest that would fire their joint passion. 'That ruled out pretty much every franchise going,' jokes David. 'And cost was also a major factor. No wonder our friends told us we were dreaming if we thought we could find the right business, let alone one at the right price!'

But dream they did, and fittingly the dream came true when they came across Dream Doors – a franchise that specialises in new kitchens and kitchen facelifts.

They were first exposed to it by a fellow Westpac manager who thought it might tick all their boxes, and reading about it in *Franchise New Zealand* magazine heightened their interest. As Sharon explains, both she and David have renovated a number of homes. 'Renovation is close to our hearts. We're both passionate about it, and to have our own business where we could channel this passion to work on behalf of our clients really was a dream opportunity.' In August this year, Sharon and David took over the Queenstown/Wakatipu Basin Dream Doors store as their very own.

BLOWING THE BUDGET – IN A GOOD WAY

The Dream Doors franchise system is highly successful in the UK and when franchise co-founder Derek Lilly decided to move to New Zealand he brought the business with him. Settling in Wanaka – a dream location – he established a pilot operation in 2007 and within a few months was working alongside his first franchisee, former engineer Eddie Spearing.

The concept was an instant hit. Eddie says he still can't quite believe that what he thought was a 'somewhat optimistic' projection of \$250,000 for his first year's trading was blown out of the water when he achieved sales of \$400,000, and Derek admits even he was surprised by the demand. 'Dream Doors was designed to fill the niche between chain store kitchens and upmarket custom-designed kitchens,' he says. 'It's a big market in the UK but it's even bigger here! We offer both new kitchens and kitchen facelifts where, for around half the price of a new kitchen, an existing kitchen can be revitalised and personalised with new doors, bench tops and appliances. Dream Doors also face-lifts laundries, bathroom vanities and bedroom wardrobes.'

New franchisee David Fleming explains, 'While older layouts may still work well and cabinets are sound, doors and bench tops get tired or dated. With Dream Doors, property owners can easily update. Whether



DAVID FLEMING & SHARON ST.CLAIR-NEWMAN:
CHANNELLING THEIR PASSION FOR RENOVATION
FOR THE BENEFIT OF THEIR CLIENTS

they just want to change their décor, command higher rentals or upgrade to sell, Dream Doors can deliver.'

FAR TOO CHEAP

So Dream Doors suited Sharon and David's passion, but how did it measure up financially? Very well, it seems. 'Our aim is to build a nationwide franchise quickly and effectively, so we don't want to have to turn down good people because of the money,' Derek explains. 'That's why we set a very low entry fee of just \$5000 +gst to fast track our growth.'

Speaking as a former financial adviser, David confesses that had Derek consulted him while he was at the bank, he would have advised him that this was far too cheap! 'But in hindsight, it makes a lot of sense. Derek's straight up about it. As he says, his income as the Dream Doors franchisor doesn't come from franchise fees

but through supplying materials and hardware to franchisees. Fast growth nationally will build brand awareness and bring benefits of group buying power for raw materials purchase and manufacturing. And, of course, although you still need to set up a showroom it makes the business very affordable so new franchisees aren't carrying the level of debt that hampers so many new ventures.'

David is also impressed by the support the franchise offers. 'Right now, going into self-employment is a trifle scary but it's very reassuring to know we have Derek's expertise and enthusiasm on call 24/7. In addition, he's pulling together an impressive board of able and talented people to complement his skills. There's a finance expert with a masters degree and an IT guru from the UK with world-leading website experience. Then there's designer Holly Sommerville, who is very much part of the training programme that teaches new franchisees all the basics of the business – from taking accurate measurements to local compliance issues as well as how to market and manage your franchise. One of the most exciting areas is the creative side. Dream Doors has fantastic 3D design software so we can develop our own ideas, but we also call on Holly for input and comment. Her flair and spatial design skills are a wonderful asset to all franchisees.'

And David ends with a recommendation. 'If you're looking for a franchise with a low buy-in and enormous potential, and you enjoy house renovation and TV programmes like *Grand Designs*, you have to talk to Derek. It could make your dreams come true.' ■

ADVERTISER INFO



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