

LIVING LIFE the way I like

FORMER RESTAURATEUR FINDS SIMPLICITY VENDING OFFERS TIME OUT FOR FAMILY

⇒ When Mark Smith says he has achieved everything he can in the hospitality industry, it's no idle boast. After gaining a management degree in hotel catering he spent his early career in five star hotels, mostly in Australia, then managed or owned a number of bb's Café franchises. Thereafter he ran his own catering business out of the Auckland Museum before setting up Soto – the Japanese restaurant on Ponsonby Road. 'Over the five years I owned it, we won a whole raft of awards but it certainly took it out of me,' admits Mark, now in his early forties. 'Now I have a totally different sort of business. It's a successful operation that has allowed me to spend time with my young family and think about the next steps in life.' Mark now operates a Simplicity Vending business in Auckland's CBD, Newmarket and Parnell.

'Vending machines work for you 24 hours a day,' he explains. 'They are an all-cash business and they don't need holidays. They require minimal maintenance and they are completely flexible – if they don't work in one place you just move them. That's why, when I first read an article about Simplicity Vending, I thought it offered an ideal opportunity to make some money and recuperate after Soto.'

RETURN & LIFESTYLE

Simplicity Vending was created by entrepreneurial teacher Steve Sartin who, with his wife Leigh, started the company in Hamilton in 2004. 'We were looking for a way of creating an additional income that would work for us in terms of both return and lifestyle,' Steve says. 'We realised vending machines could provide that for us – and for others.'

The simple and robust machines dispense well-known confectionery and novelty items from a variety of high-traffic locations. 'We help new licensees get all the start-up locations, provide stock and give ongoing coaching and training to help them make the most of the opportunity with marketing tools proven in New Zealand. We operate around 100 of the machines ourselves, and licensees like Mark already have 100 in their own area. Despite that, it's still only a part-time business for him.'

Mark says he spends around five full days a month servicing his machines. 'I visit all of them once a month, and those with heavier volumes possibly need two or three visits. Simplicity Vending is a turn-key operation but as with every venture you don't just sit there and let it do itself from day one. I put a lot of time and effort into the early days analysing the performance of each location and re-siting underperforming machines, but now it is fine-tuned I can afford to sit back and enjoy time with my children. It is a very good earner for me.'

A great advantage of the Simplicity Vending machines is that they are robust. 'They are a really solid, simple coin slot machine,'

MARK SMITH IS ENJOYING TAKING TIME
OUT WHILE HIS MACHINES MAKE MONEY

says Mark. 'No power is required and they are made of the best quality steel fittings on the market. They are pretty much indestructible – I've got a couple in some of the rougher bars and they haven't broken yet! Another big plus I have found is that they complement other vending machines. I have got several in areas in which the bigger hotels have put those large, complex machines that dispense cans and packets and ours are much appreciated. Not only are we offering a service for both customers and staff, but we're also a wonderful fund-raiser for World Vision. Having spent so long in business where you are obliged to keep taking, it is nice to be able to give something back. I have found it really motivating and refreshing, and so far this year I believe we have contributed around \$15,000 to the charity.'

START SMALL AND GROW

Simplicity Vending offers a number of packages to enable licensees to get started. 'The latest is our *Beat the Recession* package which costs \$19,997 and buys 10 machines,' says Steve. 'It is designed to allow people to start a small business with low capital. Beyond that, licensees can select their level of investment to suit the time and money they have available. Whatever you decide, we will do all the initial set-up including site selection and machine delivery, and will also provide \$2,500 worth of stock to get you going. Our product range includes well-known brands such as M&Ms – history shows there's always a demand for such convenience products and, of course, you also benefit from each brand's own huge marketing campaign.'

Mark Smith confirms that setting up a good business with Simplicity Vending is not difficult. 'It takes time and effort initially but has got easier and easier,' he says. 'It is such a simple concept that basic selling skills will get your machines where you want them. I have every intention of being in for the long haul – it is giving me a good income, allowing me much more time with my family and helping others. It's also giving me time to plan my book about wine! What more could you ask?' ■

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