



BUSINESS MANAGEMENT IN THE BIG CITY

Tess L'Estrange – Marketing and Operations Manager

“Welcome to Priceline Pharmacy Bourke Street Mall, Australia’s largest pharmacy. It’s lovely to see you.”

More than just a greeting, this affirmation is delivered to every customer as they walk through the doors. At 2085 square metres of shop floorspace, Priceline Pharmacy Bourke Street Mall is a commendable force to be reckoned with. Spread over two levels of beauty and retail offerings, customers flow through the ‘mall within a store’ to reach the pinnacle – a sizable dispensary and professional services area equal to a standard pharmacy area.



Owner Sietel Singh Gill is the first to admit this is a very big business with a very big team. It was his vision of transforming this business into the largest and best pharmacy in Australia, from a Priceline retail store, that drove the transition to offering pharmacy services in June 2013. The pharmacy's business model has always been about getting the script growth and winning on a world class customer service approach.

"There are days where I lament the sheer size of the pharmacy, but I also know that it produces a customer experience and means something to the people of Melbourne in a way that a lot of other pharmacies don't," he says.

"The compliment cards and letters that come through about the store are very humbling and really meaningful because a small corner pharmacy cannot win in the CBD market in the same way."

The large number of staff required for a pharmacy of this size has required the management team to become creative and disciplined when communicating. Often two staff meetings are held on the same day to ensure all staff members are kept up to date and there is an emphasis on Category team discussions and whiteboard dashboards with loyalty and growth targets for each department. Each of the 60 team members of Priceline Pharmacy Bourke Street Mall are aware of the annual sales budget and department budgets which are discussed at the weekly staff meetings.

"The bigger and more complex your business the more critical it is to set really clear goals for everybody to move towards," he says.

This is why Sietel keeps the objective and goals of the business simple. Utilising learnings from his Entrepreneur's Organisation membership, Sietel implemented the Gazelle's Systems *One Page Strategic Plan* – a document that all staff and especially the leadership team are intimately familiar with.

"The regular management meetings are constantly looking back at the strategy. We talk about the one or two key numbers, script growth, budgetary numbers – the numbers that matter are talked about daily," he says.

"Where we can take it to the next level, is by getting every member of the team to memorise the one page strategic plan. Right now they can walk up to a wall and look at it, and most of them understand meeting the budgets, but they need to enhance their knowledge to the next level. Once we start doing that at every level of the store, I think we will start to generate the managers of the future and potential pharmacy owners of the future."

Creative discussions and information sharing at regular strategic planning days provide opportunities for growth in the store. Sietel says that by just putting an idea forward, even if you haven't got the opportunity to execute the project, in the short term, allows you to be ready for them when they eventually do fall into your lap.

“That’s how we were able to ally with our nurse practitioner Emma to offer flu vaccination and women’s health clinics. Planting the seed through planning days allowed Alex and Sonja (Bongers and Bojanic, pharmacists) to recognise that Emma was a cultural and skill fit for our team and store vision, such that we have capitalised on an opportunity when it came our way.”

There have been some great initiatives to come out of these planning days such as a Gardasil vaccination clinic, eczema and hay fever care plans, consumer education sessions on disease state management, and servicing the nearby Chinatown customers by advertising our script-on-file service translated into Old Chinese.

The Office Workplace Wellness Service is a prime example of the pharmacy identifying a need in their local community and filling a service gap. Regular office and workplace visits were made to see what the pharmacy could do to better serve their CBD community; time and access to services were highlighted as a hurdle for the workers. From this the service was born – an intranet was established allowing office workers to order pharmacy products which would be delivered alongside any dispensed scripts, and pharmacists also provide health checks and counselling services in on-site meeting rooms.

“Having the conversation and working with workplaces provides access to a whole new customer in a completely different way,” Sietel says.

“If you’re someone who is so busy that you are missing out on your Lipitor and you’ve got a five day gap between repeats because you actually couldn’t get to your local pharmacy because you are at work, we provide the solution.”



A service like this meets the philosophy of the store - if someone comes into the store for a service, they are going to leave with their day made. The Daymakers philosophy is the mindset of all team members and the service they provide, with Sietel saying it is their job to make sure a quality service is delivered and customers leave happy. The majority of people who come into a pharmacy are feeling unwell or busy, and the team members have a goal to make this the best experience in that customer’s day, rather than a burden or another chore to complete.

“When I talk to pharmacists I say OK, you can be the pharmacist who stands in the dispensary, or you can be a free range, get out into the store and get out there with the mission to make somebody’s day.”

“Fundamentally it is not about just charming the customer, it’s about solving a problem.”

The philosophy is extended and emphasised when sourcing new staff. Sietel uses the Geoff Smart Topgrading methodology of building a virtual bench, which is a list of 10 people in priority order who could replace any team member if they were to leave. When Sietel had to recently replace his Pharmacist Manager Sanja Bojanic while she was on maternity leave, Sietel turned to his virtual bench and recruited from potentials he already knew. Sietel and his management team run a virtual bench for each role in the pharmacy, ensuring they get the right person to fit the right role. Potential employees are still interviewed for the role and reference checks are completed, however the virtual bench gives more insight to Sietel on whether these potential employees will fit with the culture of the store and live the values of tenacity, excitement and integrity.



“If you get the values right, a lot of the training can happen more easily to build on a person’s skill and experience set. If you don’t get the values right, that person won’t work out.”

The key component to Sietel's success with virtual benches is proficient use of social media – with Facebook as his preferred tool.

“For me, LinkedIn is great if you are interested in seeing someone's resume. I'm less interested in resumes, I'm more interested in what people are actually like, so I use Facebook. I forge a lot of new territory and what somebody has done is not as interesting as what somebody could do, and that's why I have a lot of success with younger pharmacists.”

Team members success and self discipline is important to Sietel which is why he has implemented 5/15 reports in his pharmacy – a quick snapshot of how a person or team is performing and feeling, along with a list of weekly achievements and ideas for improving the business. A 5/15 report gets all team members to organise their time and goals effectively. Sietel says people don't just wander in and coast in a business where 5/15's work effectively.

“Everyone can be accountable for what they are doing and can ask for help if needed,” says Sietel.

“A good manager will see these and the conversations become about problem solving rather than monitoring people.”

Sietel says it mainly comes down to trust – trust in his team and trust in the processes he and the management team have implemented.

“The single best thing I can do for my store is not get in the way, but be a steward. I think the best owners are stewards as opposed to doers or micromanagers or even managers.”

“To be a steward you have got to remind people that this is the goal and here is where we want to be, let's just check in to make sure we are heading towards that goal, heading towards the most important thing, because that is the measure of success or failure.” ■