

DATE: 18th September 2008
 PUBLICATION: BRW
 PAGE: 60
 AUTHOR: Jeanne-Vida Douglas
 CIRCULATION: 70, 473



Lifecycle



● Most people would be hard pressed to see the connection between strategic marketing, leadership and chopping vegies in the kitchen. But Leona Watson has given her cookery class business, Cheeky Food Group, a new twist: from teaching people how to make dinner, to teaching them how to work together at the same time.

"Initially it was really a cooking class, and the focus was more on the chef and the food," Watson says. "But we realised that if you can actually use the cooking exercise to organise the group into a team, you can hit a lot of business objectives and communicate a lot of corporate messages in a really fun, interactive way."

Watson was eventually able to drop her part-time marketing consultancy practice to concentrate on the cooking venture, which she started at home in 2002 with two chefs as partners and just \$7500 between them.

The business really took off when it was restructured to focus on corporate team building.

"We'd tapped into a really important need for team-building exercises that everyone can enjoy and learn from and participate in on an equal level," Watson says.

"For the first two years it was really about seeing whether or not we had a business, then we started getting so busy that I was getting buried in the operational side of things, and just lost sight of actually running and marketing the company."

After working in the big end of town, Watson was particularly keen to ensure her small business operated like a big business when it came to strategy and marketing. Rather than sink under operational demands and stymie growth, she hired a business coach and concentrated on marketing and strategy.

"I applied the same principles of marketing, brand and product development I would in a large company," Watson says. "Just because there are less zeros in small business doesn't mean you have to be less professional or less strategic."

As a result, Cheeky Food Group grew into a company with 40 staff, with its own premises in the inner-city Sydney suburb of Surry Hills. Watson also bought out her partner, and took full control of the business.

"Last year was slow because of all the changes, but in the last three months, we doubled the business we did all of last year, and it doesn't look like slowing down," Watson says. **BRW**

○○○
Just because there are less zeros in small business doesn't mean you have to be less strategic

Interview: Jeanne-Vida Douglas

Leona Watson

Cheeky Food Group

Position:	Director
Milestones:	2002: Founded Cheeky Food Group
	2005: Began working full-time, rapid expansion
	2006: Hired a business coach, doubled revenue
	2007: Moved into purpose-built facility
	2008: Bought out business partner

LIFECYCLE: **REINVENTION**

Marketing consultant opens leadership and cooking school

● Most people would be hard pressed to see the connection between strategic marketing, leadership and chopping vegies in the kitchen. But Leona Watson has given her cookery class business, Cheeky Food Group, a new twist: from teaching people how to make dinner, to teaching them how to work together at the same time.

“Initially it was really a cooking class, and the focus was more on the chef and the food,” Watson says. “But we realised that if you can actually use the cooking exercise to organise the group into a team, you can hit a lot of business objectives and communicate a lot of corporate messages in a really fun, interactive way.”

Watson was eventually able to drop her part-time marketing consultancy practice to concentrate on the cooking venture, which she started at home in 2002 with two chefs as partners and just \$7500 between them.



Just because there are less zeros in small business doesn't mean you have to be less strategic

The business really took off when it was restructured to focus on corporate team building.

“We'd tapped into a really important need for team-building exercises that everyone can enjoy and learn from and participate in on an equal level,” Watson says.

“For the first two years it was really about seeing whether or not we had a business, then we started getting so busy that I was getting buried in the operational side of things, and just lost sight of actually running and marketing the company.”

After working in the big end of town, Watson was particularly keen to ensure her small business operated like a big business when it came to strategy and marketing. Rather than sink under operational demands and stymie growth, she hired a business coach and concentrated on marketing and strategy.

“I applied the same principles of marketing, brand and product development I would in a large company,” Watson says. “Just because there are less zeros in small business doesn't mean you have to be less professional or less strategic.”

As a result, Cheeky Food Group grew into a company with 40 staff, with its own premises in the inner-city Sydney suburb of Surry Hills. Watson also bought out her partner, and took full control of the business.

“Last year was slow because of all the changes, but in the last three months, we doubled the business we did all of last year, and it doesn't look like slowing down,” Watson says. [BRW](#)