

AHEAD OF THEIR TIME

Peak Health Management

Since its inception over ten years ago, *Peak Health Management* has been the dominant player in corporate health management. With an innovative approach and holistic attitude, directors Chris Rabba and Lou Pascuzzi have taken the company to new levels and reaped the rewards.

When Chris Rabba signed Lou Pascuzzi for a gym membership at *Melbourne's Grand Hyatt* health club, he never contemplated where this chance meeting would lead. Lou soon became an advocate of Chris' early morning Spinning classes, but Chris was having second thoughts about his current position and had begun researching the corporate health market.

"There were only a few players in the market at the time, it was very niche and I was sure it could be done better," says Chris of the state of the corporate health industry.

Chris knew Lou had a corporate background and approached him to put a business plan together. After spending many nights tweaking and re-evaluating they identified the validity of the market and its future. It was here *PEAK* in its current format was born.

Good contacts

Trading under *Peak Fitness Management*, one of their early strategies was to get some recognised clients behind them. Thanks to the calibre of clientele at the *Hyatt*, Chris generated

a number of key contacts. When he mentioned to one of the partners at *PriceWaterhouseCoopers* that he was leaving the *Hyatt* and starting a new business, it proved fateful timing. By chance *PWC* were tendering for the management of their on-site gym.

"I got in with only a few days to put a tender together, and we came up trumps. We defeated an established competitor that had market monopoly at the time," says Chris.

This was the break *PEAK* needed while they were still in an embryonic state. The newly formed entity that realistically started in Chris' second bedroom in a flat in the suburbs had successfully presented to a blue chip corporation.

Using new initiatives

Back in *PEAK's* early days, the demand and main focus was fitness – corporate fitness and personal training. But about six years ago Chris and Lou pre-empted a major shift in the industry where people were also looking at holistic alternatives and wellness as a complete entity. To capitalise on this Lou took the initiative to change the name from *Peak Fitness Management* to *Peak Health Management*.

"Fitness put us into one category, but the word health is more holistic and encapsulates the whole wellness theme and evolution, and that is what I believe we're in at the moment," says Chris.

Peak Health Management is now broken up into three key service mix components – corporate gym set up and management, corporate health promotion services, and health screening and corporate medical services.

"Back then we really had to lay claim to establishing an industry," says Lou.

Photography by Charlie Suriano.



By Elisa Tubecki



Chris Rabba.

“ One of the strategies for securing market share is being innovative and staying ahead of your competitors. ”

And they were. Previously corporate health promotion, executive health, pre-employment medicals and travel vaccinations were carried out by Occupational Health and Safety, or separate companies in the medical field. *PEAK* used these components incorporated with their corporate fitness and holistic approach, and offered it to clients on a national level.

“We’re often referred to as ahead of our time because many people hadn’t heard of this before. It was out there, but very segmented, no one had heard of a company able to provide this under one banner,” adds Chris.

Growth spurts

The demand for these newly introduced services created exponential growth for *PEAK* which needed an element of funding. Over the last ten years *PEAK* has moved their head office three times to accommodate increasing staff numbers, as they’re very much a labour intensive organisation. Currently they have 40 permanent and part-time staff, as well as a high number of casuals and sub-contractors.

Chris and Lou have worked the company into a position where they are liquid enough to fund themselves through growth spurts and not have to put their hands out to investors. They have made significant investments in medical equipment and staff, health based promotions staff and management hierarchy.

“With the rapid growth of the company the finances were a big challenge for me. I do have the double degree (*Bachelor Business in Marketing and Accounting*), but I am not an accountant per se. Just the risks that come with overdrafts and taking out loans for buildings, we really have done well with managing business growth financially,” explains Lou.

And it just keeps growing. Ten years ago *PEAK* had to convince companies to actually consider such a concept. Now thanks to the wellness revolution they’ve had to pull back their market stimulation ... and marketing promotions. These days Human Resource departments are hunting for these sorts of services and will search the Internet, do their own research and ask around.

“I still can’t believe over the last few years how much business we get through natural attrition, through the phone, it’s been fantastic. This is exactly where we want to be, but we did a lot of work to get to this level,” says Lou.

Jumping hurdles

As the focus on being healthy has shifted from fitness and weight loss to overall health and wellbeing, and the importance of health in people’s lives has become a higher priority, Chris and Lou have witnessed an increase in their competition. Something they actually thrive on.

“We’ve kept a lot of our initiatives, company information, business models and financials very close to our chest because, particularly of late, it has become quite an aggressive industry and everyone is buying for market share. One of the strategies for securing market share is being innovative and staying ahead of your competitors,” explains Chris.

PEAK have even come across their competitors pretending to be potential clients to source their new initiatives. They've found their language paraphrased on competitors websites in regards to new marketing strategies or promotions that weren't there previously. But *PEAK* have used this to their advantage.

"Every product offering we have is different, it's customised for every client and each year we offer new initiatives which have competitor insulation. We are basically insulating ourselves from competitor initiatives by having new approaches and differentiating ourselves. So the clients are getting all these extra additions from *PEAK* and this is how we've been able to keep *PEAK* at the forefront and maintain customer loyalty," says Lou.

Chris and Lou have been able to manage the high volume of hands on work hours with balancing their personal lives. Lou's wife Adelina has been a pillar of support and has basically supported both Lou and Chris during the inception of the company and right up until today.

Lou is extremely proud of being able to balance his work and his family life now he has two children Portia and Jonathan.

"I think you should be asking my wife this, but I think I've done well and at this point in time, everyone is happy," laughs Lou.

For Chris balancing family and friends, as well as being a competitive international athlete during the first few years of launching *PEAK* was a challenge.

"I guess it's the balancing act of trying to fulfil all aspects of the wellness circle," says Chris. "Not to mention trying to practise what we preach, trying to maintain a holistic view of wellness within our personal lives. It's important to be fit, eat well, try not to stress and time manage."

A winning partnership

Both Chris and Lou believe that one of the keys to the success of *PEAK* has been their great partnership and friendship. During their partnership there has been a myriad of instances where they have needed each other personally or professionally and they've simply dropped everything to be there for each other.

"It's been a fantastic part of Chris' and my partnership that you have to ask yourself the question, 'How many people or partners are basically just as happy with their relationship as when they started?'" says Lou.

"I think fragile partnerships can be the downfall of many businesses," adds Chris.

One of the keys to this relationship is that they come from two different academic backgrounds and they respect each other's area of expertise. When it comes to making decisions they don't step on each other's toes. Chris admits they have had their fair share of arguments like any partnership, but they haven't let that be their demise.

"In the end we're not perfect, each of us have made mistakes, but we basically don't point the finger. They are our mistakes. Just because I've made them or he's made them it's irrelevant. At the end of the day we accept it as being ours and we don't harp on it. We let it go, it's a mistake, we've learnt from it and we don't do it again," laughs Lou.

The future

Chris and Lou believe that this industry is still in its infancy, particularly in Australia. There are still a lot of growth opportunities for their service mix as well as new innovations they have up their sleeves.

"There are a number of organisations out there that still don't know or see the value of corporate health. In order to keep our entrepreneurial torch alight, we're always looking for the next big challenge to keep us motivated as individuals and as an entity. I see the next ten years being just as exciting as the last ten years," says Chris. **wcm**

FACT FILE

Ages: Chris 35, Lou 34

Business: Corporate health

Company: Peak Health Management

Quote: "I can count on my hands how many clients we have lost over the last ten years and that has purely been to budgetary constraints or issues with the client company, more so than not being happy with us."
– Lou Pascuzzi

Fact: Lou left his well-paid job and came on board with Chris simply because he thought Chris was 'a good guy' and the business plan stood up.

CHRIS & LOU'S FIVE KEYS TO SUCCESS

1. Innovation.
2. Attention to detail.
3. Service being paramount - 5 star service for clients.
4. A successful business partnership.
5. Shrewd human resource management
– staff that fit the company mould.