

industry spotlight

John Hadfield

With over 30 years in business, a successful career, an enviable reputation and a host of adoring employees, John Hadfield is living proof that nice guys don't finish last.

We asked John to document his time in the industry and what the future holds for him.

➔ HADFIELD SIGN CO: 1972 - 2001

"Joining the work force in 1968, I spent the traditional training years working in sign manufacturing businesses until I finished my training and completed an apprenticeship."

"Looking for new challenges, I started my business in March 1972 and opened Hadfield Sign Co. The business grew rapidly and for many years we answered all the usual challenges such as expeditious growth, financial growth issues, work place training and planning difficulties."

"As the business grew, I underwent further training through various institutions and was lucky to be mentored by leading industry professionals, accruing the knowledge I yearned for. I joined key associations such as the SAA, SGIAA, ME&SA and NSCA to name a few. As my reputation within the industry grew, I became the National Chairman of the Sign Association of Australia. Then came the time when I looked back at my core business, and with wife Julie, decided our future needed to be clear! In 1990 I was awarded a Life Membership to the Sign Association of Australia (The SAA changed its name to the Australian Sign and Graphics Association – ASGA in 2005)."

LETTER AND SIGN SYSTEMS: 1985 - 1992

"I set up Letter & Sign Systems in Melbourne in 1986, expanding to Sydney in 1987 before selling the business to Vogel's in 1993."

"We decided our core competencies were better used in conjunction with our core knowledge base - manufacturing in the Sign and Graphics industry."

"We had experience in running a medium sized manufacturing business and employed around 25 staff, plus we were actively involved in a Sydney and Melbourne based supply business. But what is this all about, we asked?"

"So, in 1993 we set about challenging ourselves to build, direct and manage a





An easy to use system



KiM in action!

focused profit centre, based on and working with the ideals we had set. Quality Assurance to ISO 9002 followed, and we integrated a custom built software business program to manage the production processes.”

“Our core business, Hadfield Sign Co, was sold to another leading sign manufacturer in Sydney - Cunneen Signs. I am happy to say it is still travelling along just fine and they picked up a couple of ASGA Awards in September.”

SIGN ONE SIGN SYSTEMS: 1995 - 2001

“While reviewing our methods we developed more innovative concepts, leading to accreditation to the Australian Technology Showcase and the first of two products ‘Sign One Sign Systems’.”

“In 2000 we sold Sign One to an international company, and as a part of the contract I took the role of International Manager of Sign Products. This meant travelling the world for about two years, gaining knowledge and skills, and training sales staff and users of the product range.”

CONTROL ZONE: 2003 - PRESENT

“On return I took some time out to recharge my batteries, but before too long the phone started ringing. I got asked a question: ‘John, do you know or have a particular system or method to put in place to make your business successful?’”

“I was intrigued with the question and the opportunities it raised, so after a few meetings and discussions www.controlzone.com.au was born. Our work involves looking at issues to do with people, processes and systems.”

“I guess my key asset is ‘experience’. I am very ‘hands on’, so as a business idea I took a good hard look at what a company in this industry needs to be successful. Using the experience and tools we had developed over the years, we created a company that helps others build their skills, so they make the right decisions based on all available options.”

“The key areas of business assistance we offer are planning issues, web and email marketing, and we offer consultancy services to businesses who wish to achieve results.”

“I guess the best way to understand what we do, is to see what others have to say about how I have helped their businesses. At www.controlzone.com.au/testimonials, visitors can find a better explanation of what services and products the company offers.”

“As the client list grew, I contacted a long time friend of Hadfield Sign Company, Luke Rochester, who shared the same excitement and passion about building people, processes and systems.”

KNOWLEDGE & INFORMATION MANAGEMENT: 2003

When John Hadfield first met Luke Rochester in 1996, they spent most of the time talking about their favourite surfing spots in Sydney. What formed, in between tall stories of monstrous swells, was a friendship that has lasted a decade.

John, with 35 years experience in the Sign Industry is an expert, whilst Luke holds an honours degree in Engineering and a Graduate Diploma in Psychology. Together they focus on people, processes and systems, turning information into knowledge in sign businesses around Australia.

In the mid 90’s, when most people were building brochure websites, John and Luke were using the interactive nature of the internet. This enabled the customers of Hadfield Sign Co to do their own quotes online using a ‘Product Configurator’ that Luke built from John’s designs.

Along with numerous other innovative uses of technology, the proudest accomplishment you’ll hear them quote is the fact that John was able to take 14 weeks holiday with his family in the peak of his company’s growth, a testimony to this ‘set and forget’ technology. This had a direct impact on his ability to later sell his business, and the fact it is still

running strong today is testament to the people, processes and systems he established when he was the owner. The importance they place on providing their customers with a lifestyle that enables them to go on holidays while the business grows, was celebrated when they recently won a silver medal for education and training at the ASGA Sign and Graphics Awards 2006. John, modest as always, said after the awards, “I can handle coming second to Victoria University.”

It would be a mistake to judge them as larrikins due to their good humoured, light-hearted approach, in fact quite the opposite. In 2003, they came up with an information and management solution designed specifically for the Sign and Graphics industry. They completed the implementation of four pilot sites, officially launched in February 2006, and already have well over one hundred users ranging from single user systems to server based networks catering for 10 to 20 users at a time.

Users of John’s system are based in Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia, quite an achievement considering the official release of KiM was in May 2006. Previously, all the sites commissioned where running the ‘BETA’ version for testing.

Their solution is setting the standard for the Sign and Graphics industry. It forms a hub of information relating to customers, suppliers, contacts, employees, sales leads, quotes, jobs, invoices, equipment, materials, any file on your network and any document on your shelf. They say that providing easy and instant access for all your employees drastically improves communication, and turns information into knowledge, hence the name of their system KiM – Knowledge & Information Management (www.kim.net.au).

Life is good for John, and though he may not be battling massive winter swells anymore, he is still making waves in the industry that loves and respects him. 