

No holding back this message

Marsha Jacobs

MESSAGES on Hold managing director Kym Illman attributes the growth of his business to a total focus on customer service.

With a business philosophy to work out what a customer wants, give it to them and then give them something extra, Mr Illman has grown his business from a one-man band to employing more than 50 full time staff with clients in more than 14 countries.

With a background in media, Mr Illman got the original idea for Messages on Hold after being sacked from Channel 9, hearing the American Express on-hold audio, and thinking "I can do this".

Mr Illman believes Messages on Hold is now two and a half times bigger than its next largest competitor, and in five years time will turn over more than \$18 million.

"People expect to be treated with indifference and to have to beg for what they want. We give them what they want and more," Mr Illman said.

With a range of attention grabbing promotional material, Mr Illman admits he takes marketing ideas from different people and businesses and applies them to his own.

In fact, Mr Illman has written a book, *The Future is Customer Service*, in which he outlines a series of short stories about excellent customer service, many of which he has applied to his business.

Mr Illman's business partner is his wife, who was also his first employee before becoming his wife.



THE RIGHT MESSAGE: Kym Illman and Tonya Allian say their young team's strong focus on customer service is a key to the success of Messages on Hold. *Photo: Tim van Bronswijk*

Messages on Hold has been nominated for a myriad of small business, family and entrepreneurial awards, winning many of them.

The company has been at its East Perth offices for just over a year, complete with audio studios and all the technical equipment necessary to run the company in house.

Mr Illman said Messages on Hold had no plans to list as he was having "far too much fun to answer to

anyone else".

"We find all our own clients and don't advertise much - we have found there is no avenue of promotion that is as successful as playing potential clients a demo," Mr Illman said. Of his somewhat controversial ambush marketing, which involves getting company logos on television for free by doing things such as holding up company signs at the football, Mr Illman said

he didn't think it was such a big deal.

"If you want to do things differently, you have to sail close to the wind, and we don't play it safe," he said.

Mr Illman also has several other revenue streams, which include holding seminars on customer service, and books and DVDs on the topics. Producing over 250 audio promotions a week using a variety of actors and radio personalities, Mr



MESSAGES ON HOLD

- Strong, committed focus on customer service
- From one-man band to more than 50 full time staff
- Young, vibrant team switched on to client needs
- Clients in more than 14 countries
- Turnover aim of \$18m in the next five years
- Produces more than 250 audio promotions a week

Illman said one of the biggest challenges was finding good staff.

"Finding staff that fit in with our culture has been a trial in the past, but we have a great team now with an average age of 24 who are switched on, bright, young, customer service focused people and we reward their successes," he said.

"It's good that we are never satisfied with the business - it pushes us to keep growing and making it better."