



Illmans get their message out

FIRST-GENERATION WINNER – MESSAGES ON HOLD

□ Julie-anne Sprague

MUCH of Messages On Hold's success can be attributed to its focus on good, old-fashioned customer service, according to owners Kym and Tonya Illman.

And it's a formula the 2004 Family Business Awards first-generation winner will apply in ventures planned for the coming year.

The Illmans have spent the past 16 years growing Messages On Hold into a multi-million dollar business.

This year the company aims to double its turnover to about \$10.5 million, and is also launching a customer services training division and a book dedicated to stories about the gains to be made from good customer service.

"This is the most exciting time of our business life," Mr Illman

"It's [the book] called *The Future is Customer Service* and I've already sold \$11,000 worth and it hasn't even been launched yet."

Mr Illman has spent the past year writing the book, which is a collection of global customer service stories.

"There are a lot of text books that say this is what customer service is, but what this book does is give examples of what people are doing and they are making money from it," he said.

"Every business person is interested in that and there is something in it for everyone."

On the back of the book's launch will be a new training division based at Messages On Hold's East Perth office.

While in its early stages, Mr Illman believes there is demand



TOP PERFORMERS: Over 16 years Tonya and Kym Illman have built Messages On Hold into a multi-million dollar business. Last year they sold product into China and Singapore, while projects this year include a book and new training division based at Messages On Hold's East Perth office.

elaborate training room."

The new revenue streams will add to Messages on Hold's already growing bottom line.

Last year the company increased its turnover by more than 25 per cent to 5.9 million.

"We sign up 22 new clients a

pair has been able to create a successful business because of a balance in skill sets.

"He [Mr Illman] is brilliant at the sales and marketing side of things but he has very limited skills on the other side of it. I can't sell if you paid me to but I

"... what this book does is give examples of what people are doing and they are making money from it."

- Kym Illman

for a series of seminars and training courses for Western Australian businesses to send their staff.

"My feeling is that it we will run one or two seminars a week and we will have drinks afterwards so it becomes a networking thing as well," Mr Illman said.

"The company has just spent \$120,000 building this 100-seat

week and a handful of those have more than one site, so we do about 30 new sites a week," Mr Illman said.

Messages On Hold has become synonymous with on-hold message systems across Australia.

Its most recent efforts include selling its product into Singapore and China.

According to Mrs Illman, the

can keep everything else moving."

Mrs Illman works in the business three days a week but spends a fair amount of time working from home while raising the pair's children, aged two and four.

"I come in and look at all the different departments and fix things up where they are needed," she said.

MESSAGES ON HOLD SNAPSHOT

- Last year the company increased its turnover by more than 25 per cent to \$5.9m.
- Anticipated 2004-2005 turnover: \$10m.
- Messages on Hold signs up 1,500 new sites each year.
- Messages On Hold will launch a new customer service training business this year.
- Staff: 53 full-time, 42 casual.
- Kym Illman launches his book about customer service *The Future is Customer Service* on August 1, but already has \$11,000 in forward orders.