

SCOOP

MAGAZINE

WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S ESSENTIAL LIFESTYLE GUIDE



WA Legend

The incredible tale of the commander of Kokoda

Nuclear power

Why it WILL come to WA

More for men

Cigars, colognes, blues and Bentleys...

Lock up your daughters

Sex, drugs and attitude in Perth's private girls' schools

Hidden beauty

Wonderful wine, fine food, fabulous fashion, boutique bars... uncover the best of WA

Spring 2009 \$11.95
ISSN 1329-1785



9 771329 178008



Being left hanging on the telephone one day was the best thing to happen to Kym Illman. **Max Veenhuizen** finds out why it was the key to his success.

Entrepreneur Kym Illman likes to have fun.

Admittedly, it's occasionally got the Perth-born and bred businessman in strife (such as the "stupid stunt that backfired" which cost him his job in Channel Nine's audio department in 1988), but by and large, mixing business with pleasure has served him very well.

"I look at all these people out there trying to make big money and think 'that's not the goal'," says the 47-year-old.

"The goal is to get out there, have some fun and do what you like doing. I love what I do here and I'd be doing this as a hobby even if I wasn't getting paid for it. If you go out to try and make a lot of money, you won't. But if you go out to do something you love, the money comes later as a by-product

because people enjoy dealing with you because you have passion for it."

And Kym's passion is his position as chairman of The Message Group.

While the company's portfolio includes corporate training, digital marketing and luxury home hire, its most recognisable entity is Messages On Hold, an audio production company providing messages for business customers waiting on the phone. It was inspired by a memorable American Express on-hold message that he heard while waiting on the line one day. It was slick, professional and miles above the monotonous chimes and deathly silence that were the on-hold norm at the time.

After investing all of 10 minutes "researching" the concept, he declared himself ready for the industry and went in search of customer numero uno.

This seat-of-his-pants approach led to a deal with Jeans West to look after the on-hold for all its stores with Kym single-handedly writing, voicing, recording and producing the program.

Messages On Hold was established a year later, in 1989, with the Australian Taxation Office signing on as the company's first client.

Fast-forward two decades and Messages On Hold is in more than 13,000 sites in 22 countries: quite a feat since Kym and co not only had to educate potential customers about the benefit of on-hold services as well as import the equipment.

But can-do has always been the canon of Kym, who even spent two days trying his hand at door-to-door sales before his on-hold journey. "I look at a lot of business people who commission surveys and studies and spend a year doing research," he says.

"You might have spent \$40,000 researching that but if you had just gone out and done everything, you'd be in the same position except you'd know why it didn't work. I've never been frightened of having a crack. I like a gamble. You hopefully have bigger wins than you do losses."

Kym's infamous guerrilla marketing exploits are another gamble that paid dividends and created invaluable exposure for his company – perhaps you've seen those bright yellow hands giving everyone the thumbs up at Eagles home games?

Of course, some of this publicity hasn't been for the right reasons. In the early days, Kym incurred the wrath of the AFL, who didn't appreciate the free advertising he was getting. On another occasion, he got the public's collective goat by accidentally gatecrashing a news story on a young man who had died at a footy game.

Kym takes all this in his stride and refuses to let the occasional slip-up deter him from creative and decisive leadership.

"You try a lot of things, but not everything works," he says.

"Everyone who has passion and drive will succeed in business because there are so few people with it," he says.

"You go out there and look at some of the people running small businesses and you think, 'there's so much you could be doing here'."

But for all of Kym's sometimes outrageous thinking, hard work has been the cornerstone of his success and his message to would-be millionaires is don't forget your elbow grease.

"When I started, I was doing 80 hours a week and earning hardly any money," he says.

"Now I'm working a fraction of that but making far better money. It's a bit like starting a huge big ball, it takes so much energy to get it started but once it's rolling, it becomes easy. The money you earn at the end when your business is going really well is never commensurate with the hours you put in, but a lot of people want the big money without the hard work."

"Unfortunately, it doesn't work like that." 