

Business

What I've learnt

The sunny side of business

JOEL BARTFELD

Director, SunnyLIFE beach accessories

THERE is an overwhelming entrepreneurial streak in my family, so it was a foregone conclusion that I would end up in business.

Prior to starting SunnyLIFE, I had been developing products for the corporate market. By the ripe old age of 25, I was burnt out and not particularly inspired. I spent my time making products for other people's brands, when what I really wanted to do was create my own.

On holiday in Barcelona, a friend flippantly asked: "Why are beach umbrellas so ugly?" This led me to think about the lack of stylish beach accessories – and from there the concept for SunnyLIFE grew.

I returned to Melbourne and spent six months of my extra-curricular time putting together a business plan. I quit my job and started looking for a partner to back the concept. Paul Cherny (my business partner) and I had friends in common and bumped into each other at an event. A few days later, I pitched my wildly ambitious plan and within a month, we were in China together visiting suppliers.

I've always been interested in retail. I love the psychology of it – why does someone choose one product ahead of another? That led me to brand and

product development. It's all about tangibility – for it to make sense there needs to be a physical product.

The reason I chose to create an outdoor lifestyle brand is that I've always loved the beach and summer. I love that we make products that facilitate the things people enjoy most – time at the beach, or in the sunshine with family and friends.

"As a retail consumer-driven business, we've had to be nimble and responsive, and that makes us better positioned to tackle the current challenges and perhaps forge new opportunities."

As the business has grown, I've travelled a lot more. I'm in Sydney every other week presenting current ranges, or developing new ones with our key customers. I visit many of our retailers around Australia. I also do a lot of international trips, seeking out trends – with annual trips to New York, London, Paris and Tokyo.



Joel Bartfeld: "I'm one of the few people who can legitimately claim that time spent on the beach is business development."

Perhaps, the most significant benefit of being the creative director of a summer-themed lifestyle brand is that I'm one of the few people who can legitimately claim that time spent on the beach is business development. Cottesloe Beach in Perth was my most recent destination and I can report that it's absolutely stunning.

Paul's skill set perfectly complements mine. Someone once described Paul as the "deal-maker" and me as the "dream-painter". I'd suggest a little more crossing over than that, but it's a nice description. Business is challenging, so to have someone to help meet those challenges or offset deficiencies is invaluable.

We have the same goals and are very closely aligned on personal and professional ethics – which always results in successful outcomes.

Obviously, the current climate

presents new challenges – but a trick to being in business is the awareness that there's always going to be a "climate". As a retail consumer-driven business, we've had to be nimble and responsive, and that makes us better positioned to tackle the current challenges and perhaps forge new opportunities.

When we started the business, people told me "if you survive to three years, you've made it." When we turned three, those same people said, "Did I say three, I meant five." Next March we turn five, so before those people reset the parameters, I'll shove

a slice of birthday cake in their mouths.

I'm incredibly proud of the business we have built. We have a great team of people, great relationships with our customers and continue to create original and desirable products. Starting a business requires confidence; making it successful requires hard work and dedication. I can also confirm that adage that "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger".

I continue to be inspired by the simple joy that a sunny day provides.

INTERVIEWED BY
DEBORAH BLASHKI-MARKS

MY CV HIGHLIGHTS

1995: Completed high school

1996: Travelled to Israel on the Machon program with Netzer

1997-1998: After 18 months, deferred an international trade business degree

1999-2000: Worked in the family business, Bartfeld Textiles

2000-2004: Account manager for Buzz Products

2004: Established SunnyLIFE