

# Innovative thinking on the Shore

■ *Having a good idea is one thing. Possessing the courage, skills and relentless motivation to bring it to life is totally different.*

At the core of every business is "an idea."

And the North Shore is brimming with entrepreneurs who have transformed a vision into a successful business enterprise.

This month we profile a small North Shore company whose idea has been snapped up

by the world's biggest retailer, and another local innovator whose cutting-edge technology allows you to literally 'see how you sound'.



Cabco's Doug Bartlett accepts an Export award from Prime Minister Helen Clark. He encourages North Shore businesses to embrace the enormous opportunities overseas.

idea of transforming a shopping trolley into a mobile kiddies entertainment unit complete with steering wheel and onboard TV means parents and littlies can enjoy their weekly shop tantrum-free. For the retailer, it means customers are more relaxed, stay in the store longer and spend more (evidence suggests nine minutes longer, \$7 dollars extra). No wonder retail giants such as Wal-Mart have already equipped 200 US stores with the cute karts, offering a potential roll-out of 40,000 karts.

## Big business – but same principles apply

But just how did this staff-of-four, Albany based company crack Wal-Mart? And how does it continue to scoop substantial new business from other global retailing giants? Operating on this scale may sound daunting,

## Cabco - transforming the humble shopping trolley

■ The thought of taking your small child to a superstore is enough to make any parent break out in a cold sweat. For Doug Bartlett, father of two and founder of Cabco, his business epiphany came during his own family shopping experiences.

He knew there had to be a better way! His simple but brilliant

but Bartlett insists the same, familiar challenges arise just as they do when selling to a small business next door: "It's getting the basics right from the outset: offering the right product at the right price, and pursuing the key decision-maker." Sounds simple, so why do so few NZ companies go after the likes of Wal-Mart?



Bartlett implies that it's part of the kiwi self-conscious psyche. "We see ourselves as a small, remote country.

But the truth is, New Zealanders are extraordinarily savvy, have great ideas, and are truly innovative at discovering competitive edges all the time." He continues, "America's version of a niche market is our version of a gigantic market.

We just need to be prepared to step outside our comfort zone and think further afield – and yes, further than Australia!"

For Bartlett, perfecting the TV kart concept was key, but emphasises there have been other factors contributing to the company's success. He lists: "Surrounding myself with the right people who share the same passion and enthusiasm; working with investors who contribute more than just money e.g. strategy and

### What's the idea?

Cabco's TV Karts ([www.tvkart.com](http://www.tvkart.com)) combine children's entertainment with the practicalities of shopping. For a small fee (normally about \$1) customers can choose a branded kart for hire, such as Bob the Builder, Wiggles or Barney, for the duration of their shopping trip. Inside the kart is an onboard TV designed to entertain the child while mum or dad places the shopping in the overhead basket.

experience; accepting that some management responsibilities have to be relinquished to those on the ground; and making the time and effort to meet people face-to-face."

Establishing contact with the right person and then going on to form a strong relationship can never be underestimated, no matter what business you're in. Bartlett believes that no amount of emails or phone calls can equate to face-to-face contact. He also adds that the larger the organisation you're dealing with, the more patient you have to be. "Things take longer to filter through and be approved by all the various channels. For example, Wal-Mart receives 3,000 proposals a month, from which they consider 100, go to trial with four and accept only two." It's not surprising it took Cabco a year of hearing "No" to finally being accepted – after all, Wal-Mart is the world's largest retailer, has a US\$285 billion turnover, and employs 1.4 million people.

### **Funding and free advice**

There are many organisations that have helped Cabco reach today's status. Bartlett encourages North Shore companies to take full advantage of groups such as Enterprise North Shore, Technology New Zealand and the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology. "In addition to special grants and funding, these organisations have provided excellent resources and advice, and have put us in touch with other companies – one of which has proved pivotal to our business."

Despite its success thus far (30,000 customers hire a TV Kart in a typical week), Bartlett is even more excited about the future: "This is just the beginning. We have created a potent platform from which we can provide other vending services within the world's largest retail environments. We're breaking new ground every day."

Finally, when asked what's the best advice for growing businesses, Bartlett immediately recites a comment from Stephen Tindall, founder of the Warehouse: "It's better to be a small part of a big enterprise, than a big part of small enterprise." Be prepared to release some equity in order for your business to grow."