

TWOC

WORLD-CLASS

manufacturing



Mark Watson - TWC General Manager

IT TAKES SOMETHING SPECIAL FOR A LOCAL MANUFACTURER TO COMPETE AGAINST CHEAP IMPORTS AT THE BEST OF TIMES, LET ALONE WHEN THE AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR IS PEAKING. BUT IT IS A FEAT THAT TOTAL WINDOW CONCEPTS (TWC) ACHIEVES WITH EASE THANKS TO A WORLD-CLASS MANUFACTURING FACILITY AND A FOCUS ON STAFF SKILLS.



SINCE ITS HUMBLE beginnings in November 1997, TWC has undergone an amazing growth spurt, which has seen its full-time employee numbers swell from 20 to 185.

The wholesale blind manufacturer, located in the suburb of Hopper's Crossing in Melbourne's west, was the brainchild of founder Greg Campbell.

TWC now finds itself positioned as one of the largest wholesale blind manufacturers in Australia. Success didn't happen by chance. Visitors to the company's factory say that the manufacturing set-up rivals that of any high-tech manufacturer in Europe or the US. The company has also put a lot of resources into what general manager Mark Watson describes as its "greatest asset": its staff.

Full-time workers at TWC are the recent recipients of federally-recognised TAFE certificates in Process Manufacturing, thanks to a training scheme subsidised by the Federal Government.

"As concerns about a downturn in the

Australian economy grew, we decided to focus on our best asset – our staff – and put the work into the training that is required," Watson tells WFA.

"As a result, workers at the Hoppers Crossing factory were given the chance to complete their Certificate III or IV in Process Manufacturing. "For many of the workers at TWC, it was the first opportunity they'd had to undertake any sort of formal qualification."

The nine-month courses finished in August this year and Watson and the TWC team decided to celebrate this achievement with a ceremony attended by the Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard.

"Our story fitted the various portfolios she is responsible for almost completely.

"TWC has 13 ethnic groups working within the company and many of our senior positions are held by women," Watson adds.

The investment has paid off, with the training's effect on the TWC workforce even greater than anticipated.

"Output has increased through the relay of the factory floor plan, quality has improved dramatically and reworks have dropped.

"Our staff now feel empowered and the whole business is run in a very inclusive way.

"Key discussions are now done in committee and the feedback is TWC's a great place to work."

Overhauling the floor plan was one of the most significant outcomes of the training initiative, thanks to highly organised and functional workspaces.

The improved set-up has also allowed increased work station rotations, and cross training of staff between departments is now a normal practice.

Watson says that the company's strong and continual sales growth confirms the company's popularity.

"People choose us because we're easy to deal with, our quality is excellent and we're competitively priced," he says.

"Along with our investment in training, we have



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also invested very heavily in the most modern industry technology.

"We have even developed our own technology for several projects with internationally recognised companies in these areas."

Watson says the company's reputation for flexibility is what stands it apart.

"We don't like to say no," Watson says.

"The customer is always our focus."

TWC has capitalised on the surge in popularity of roller blinds by making a substantial investment in the three major fabric cutting heads and tables: Rotary Blade Cut, Crush Cutting and Ultrasonic. In partnership with an internationally recognised firm, the company has also developed semi-automated and fully-automated sewing machine systems for rollers, verticals and roman blinds.

Watson says that the management team recognises that to be a successful and profitable manufacturer in this environment, automation and best practice production techniques are essential.

"To remain competitive and maintain market

share, one has to be constantly looking for ways to improve.

"We are fortunate to have the support of companies like Acmeda, Texstyle Australia, Mermet, Shaw and Somfy who supply world-class components and fabrics.

"These companies compete extremely well in the global market and TWC is working closely with them to develop semi-exclusive products to maintain its leadership position."

Watson believes that because of its harsh climatic environment, Australia has been at the forefront in the development of window covering technology.

"We have very knowledgeable and environmentally conscious consumers and they have driven this development.

"The commercial market has become more demanding, with contracts calling for environmentally friendly fabrics, and the standards being set by organisations like the Green Building Council and Ecospecifier are extremely challenging.

"In this area, TWC's Enviroshade has been

a great success. It ticks all the boxes, being Trevira – CS it is PVC free, has extremely low VOCs and contains no harmful chemicals while still being a high-performance window covering fabric."

Motorisation has played a role in the technological advancement of roller blinds.

"Motorisation is popular because it allows people to walk into a room and have the blinds drawn electronically with the flick of a switch," Watson says.

He says customers are increasingly opting for bigger windows, which means a trend towards heavy-duty roller components.

"At the moment, the types of blinds we make are limited by the width of the fabric being used.

"Consumers will ask more and more detailed questions about the products they intend to buy as they become more attuned to effective energy ratings, environmental needs, cost, and carbon emission and energy savings."