

The Snowball Effect



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FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS, THIS COMPANY HAS SNOWBALLED INTO AUSTRALIA'S LARGEST AIRCONDITIONING MANUFACTURER AND IS A LEADING GLOBAL DEVELOPER OF ENERGY-EFFICIENT COOLING AND HEATING PRODUCTS.

It has not been an easy ride for its Founder and Chairman, Frank Seeley, AM, but it's been a successful one. Starting out selling portable airconditioners, he often had the door slammed in his face. One employer even sacked him!

However, despite this, he discovered that he was 'pretty good' at everything to do with airconditioning. He took a gamble when he decided to remortgage his own house to finance his business in 1972.

The gamble paid off. Today, that business is known as Seeley International.

What followed his courageous gamble was years of hard work to overcome the monopoly held by the provider of the electric motors used in evaporative airconditioners.

"When I went into the business back in 1972, portable airconditioning was a very competitive market. I realised we had to do something different," Frank recalls.

In his previous work selling portable evaporate airconditioners, Frank noticed that they all had one real problem: the metal parts corroded. He thought that, if they were made entirely of plastic, he could overcome that problem and produce a corrosion-free airconditioner.

There were many setbacks along the way, and many people told him it couldn't be done.

"The whole industry laughed at me, saying, 'This is ridiculous! You can't make these things from plastic,' but I had a dream and I went after that dream," Frank says.

Frank's persistence paid off. He successfully developed all-plastic evaporative airconditioners – first, portable, and then, in 1983, ducted rooftop airconditioners.

This wasn't just a breakthrough for Seeley International; it was a breakthrough for the entire industry. The all-plastic airconditioners helped the rooftop cooling market to grow in Australia from 12,000 units a year to 70,000. His plastic airconditioners became industry standard – and still are today.

So it has taken a lot of blood, sweat and tears – and more than a dash of honesty and integrity – to get Seeley to where it is today. It is now Australia's largest airconditioning manufacturer and a global leader in developing ingenious, highly energy-efficient cooling and heating products, exporting to more than 100 countries.

The company's 'can-do' attitude sets it apart from its competitors.

Frank agrees. "Where there's a will, there's a way," he says. This is the philosophy the company operates under as it continues to dominate the Australian market.

Frank is a passionate believer in Australian manufacturing.

"There is a big future for it, providing you do two things, do them well and continue doing them," Frank says.

Those two things? Automate and innovate.

"You've got to be prepared to automate, knowing that it doesn't need to cost people their jobs," Frank says. "If you innovate as well, then you grow and actually create a whole lot more jobs.

"We've been innovating for many years now, and we are known globally for our innovation. And not in a historical sense, but in a current sense. Innovation is a continuing journey."

When it comes to sourcing suppliers, Seeley takes an inventive approach. ▶



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- FRANK SEELEY



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"We certainly favour innovative suppliers," Frank says. "However, most of our innovation is in-house. What we need in a supplier is somebody who can give us a high-quality product. They need to be able to deliver to us on time, and give us products that never cause problems to our customers."

In its field, Seeley has a very good reputation for providing the most reliable products throughout the world, but this reputation can easily be destroyed if suppliers don't cooperate.

"Anyone who wants to can become one of our suppliers if they take on board our 'can-do' culture," Frank says. "This way, if there is a problem or a necessity, they will work with us

to find a solution. This way, it is advantageous for everyone. As I said before, where there's a will, there's a way."

Unfortunately for some suppliers, there just isn't the will.

"Sometimes, they have plenty of business and don't want to go to the extra effort," Frank says. "However, if they do go that extra mile, there will be a roll-on effect, and the whole organisation will benefit.

"I'm not about trying to change suppliers; I'm about establishing long-term relationships. We want partnerships with our suppliers and we are very loyal people."

"Some suppliers have been with us for many years," Frank says, "but our expansion is continuous, so Seeley is always looking for more."

International suppliers play a big part in the global success of Seeley, and the company is always working towards forging stronger relationships to cross the cultural barriers.

"We had a situation a month ago where we had a problem with a supplier in China," Frank says. "There had been a change in management, and their people didn't understand our culture, our needs, or the premium we place on reliability. We tried desperately to fix it.

"One Tuesday, I called them and said I was arriving in two days. We did the business with them, resolved the issues, and flew back on Thursday night, having been in China for just nine hours."

Such dedication shows a huge amount of commitment to the company as well as to the success of the airconditioning industry.

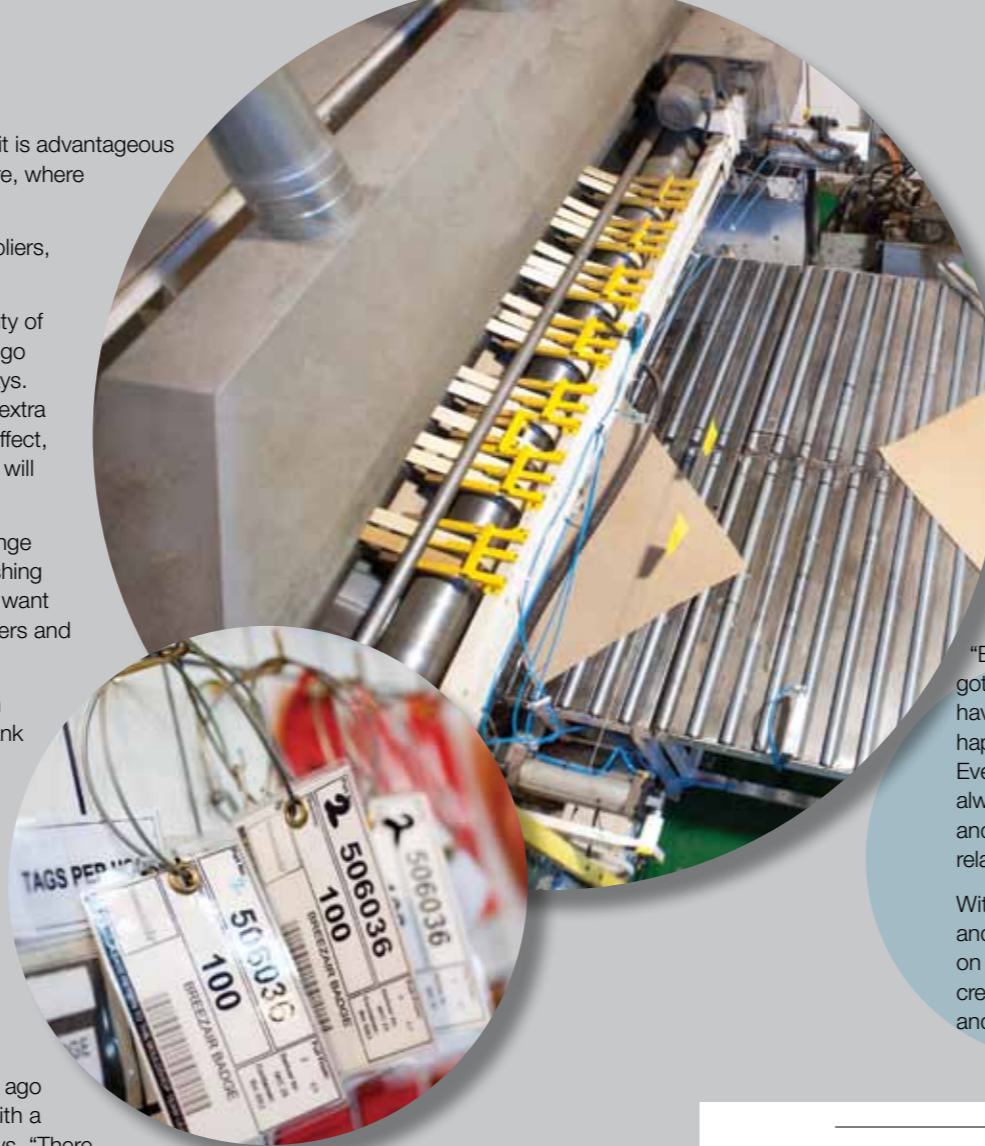
"We've got one of the most valuable assets in the world in our commitment to success, and we're not going to mess it up," Frank says.

World-Class Wizardry

The latest product brought out by Seeley International, Climate Wizard, has received national and global recognition. It won an Australian International Design award and took silver in the United States of America Dealer Design awards. This product certainly has a bright future ahead of it.

Climate Wizard is an indirect cooling system that delivers very cold temperatures inside – even when it's over 40 °C outside – at a fraction of the cost of refrigerated systems. Climate Wizard works by using the natural cooling power of evaporation to dramatically reduce air temperature – without adding any moisture. It is typically able to cool hot, ambient air by up to 35 °C, depending on the ambient air temperature and the humidity.

The Australian International Design Award is the seventh award that Seeley International's Climate Wizard product has picked up in the past two years, along with many finalist accolades.



"A BILLION-DOLLAR COMPANY WILL BE THE RESULT AS WE CONTINUE TO GROW OUR MARKET SHARE AND RELEASE EVER-MORE REVOLUTIONARY PRODUCTS."

- FRANK SEELEY

With this attitude, distance won't affect the consistency of the supply chain. It's more a case of getting to understand the cultural differences and then considering those.

"Phone and email make communication a lot easier these days, so from that point of view the world has shrunk," Frank says.

"But when it comes down to the nitty-gritty, you've got to be able to look into people's eyes, and they have to be able to look into yours. When that happens, they find that we are who we say we are. Even when you're a good communicator, you can always be better, especially when communication and trust form the basis of any good long-term relationship."

With a commitment to working only with innovative and excellent suppliers and employees, Seeley is on its way to fulfilling its vision to lead the world in creating climate-control solutions of premium quality and high energy-efficiency.

New products are coming out all the time, all of which are the most energy-efficient on the market.

"We have made a cooler with an inverter motor in it," Frank says. "It can cool a whole home for the cost of running one single light-globe."

As well as this, the company recently won Australia's first-generation Family Business of the Year Award for 2010.

With such a leader, it's no wonder that inspiration is at the heart of the company.

"A billion-dollar company will be the result as we continue to grow our market share and release ever-more revolutionary products," Frank predicts. "We're never satisfied. The moment you become complacent, you're on the slippery slope to oblivion. We have products using transformational technologies in Italian factories, in universities in the United Kingdom and all around Australia, so it's really starting to snowball."

Since the beginning, the avalanche that first hit Frank engulfed the very company that had sacked him so long ago. He eventually bought them out. What goes around, comes around, so long as you have the right 'can-do' attitude. 🍀



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