

If the cap fits



FIT TECHNOLOGIES IS A SMALL COMPANY WITH SOME BIG IDEAS ABOUT TAKING ON THE AUSTRALIAN ACCESSORIES MARKET, AS **BELINDA SMART** DISCOVERED.

THERE'S A LOT OF TALK THESE DAYS about the accessories boom, a phenomenon that has taken flight in recent times with the heavily accessorised look of current fashion trends.

But while many companies are capitalising on this growth by specialising in particular product areas such as jewellery, belts or bags, Queensland direct importer Fit Technologies has pinned its hopes on providing the broadest possible range of product and a flexible, speedy service.

What's more, Fit is not finicky about size and will service clients of all dimensions with production runs to match.

It's an ambitious business model, but one that seems to be paying dividends in Australia's saturated accessories market, not least because of the high level of service Fit offers.

The company was established in December 2004, after founders and directors Amanda Fitcher and Samone Margieson saw a gap in the market for an outfit that could supply a diverse range of accessories and merchandise to a broad client base.

Boasting an impressive combined experience in accessory development totalling 15 years, the duo was in a prime position to understand the market. Fitcher had worked as head of sales with an importing company that specialised in headwear for six years and also understood the ins and outs of production, while Margieson had worked in a key role at the accessories division of Billabong Australia for 10 years, also running the surf giant's international wetsuit division.

Fit's third staff member, production manager Rebecca Bird, came with 10 years knowledge of production management, patternmaking, design, merchandising and quality control and also had an eight-year stint as Billabong's accessories design assistant under her belt.

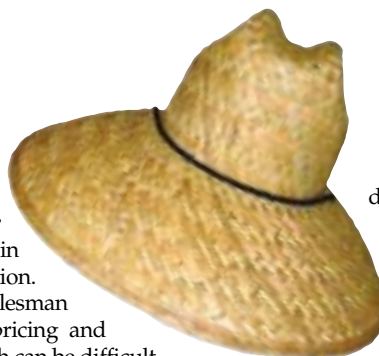
This level of expertise, together with an accessible, hands-on approach to customer service has played a crucial role in building the company's reputation.

"We offer flexible designs, salesman samples ranges, competitive pricing and low minimums: all factors which can be difficult for labels to achieve – especially smaller brands – when dealing direct with factories," explains Fitcher, who describes Fit's target market as "a mix of youth culture and fashion labels together with large corporate companies."

The company works across three product categories: headwear – last year its top selling item was the wool blend 'urban flat peak' cap with customised logos – accessories and merchandise, all of which are made available through Fit's flexible product design service.

Headwear includes baseball caps, beanies, bucket hats, Castro military caps, fedora hats, straw cowboy hats and a large range of fashion hats; accessories includes socks, belts – from cotton web to studded leather – scarves, satchels, fashion bags, shoulder bags, surf and snowboard bags, travel bags, iPod cases, backpacks, sports bags and tote bags; while the merchandise division specialises in promotional and event product from key rings to military dog tags, pin badges to stubby coolers.

If the company's stock list is something of a mouthful, its list of clients is no less impressive, and includes some high profile names: Globe, Paul Frank, Mossimo, Freshjive, Stussy, M-One-11, Quiksilver, Roxy, Electric Visual, Russell Athletic, Lonsdale, Reef, Jetpilot, Fox, Arnette Eyewear, Carlton and United Breweries, Oakley Australia, Nickelodeon, Speedo Australia, Suburban, Zoo York and MCD.



The company's point of difference lies in its ability to supply these labels with a diverse range of products, Fitcher claims.

"We noticed there are companies that offer only one product while Fit Technologies specialises in a broad range. Through working with key suppliers we are able to supply a large range of premium quality products and achieve bulk buying power from our factories."

Few accessories companies in Australia have the capability to supply such a broad range of product to order, so it's perhaps no surprise that Fit is kicking some serious goals.

The company's first year annual turnover of \$985,000 shows no sign of abating, says Fitcher.

"While the annual sales growth of such a young company is difficult to predict at this stage, so far we estimate a quarterly growth between 15 and 20 per cent for the first calendar year of trading."

All Fit Technologies product is sourced and manufactured in China and Korea, where factories can deliver on price, technology, quality and product choice. With fashion retail turnaround times continually shrinking, the company also regards speed to market as a central tenet of its offer.

"We are able to provide fairly quick turnaround times; three weeks for prototype development, two weeks for salesman samples, four to six weeks for production and two weeks delivery via sea freight."

"Due to our size we are able to offer a very high level of one-on-one customer service. We ensure all queries or emails are answered on the same day and are available on mobile at any time of the day and year," says Fitcher.

So far Fit has relied on word-of-mouth from satisfied clients or direct campaigns to promote its services and has built up substantial databases targeting specific industry contacts. But clearly the company is ready to take on the market.

One of the first steps it will take in this direction is the upcoming launch of an advertising campaign across a number of surf and fashion industry publications.

"We've just allocated budgets and will start our print media advertising for the 2006/07 financial year as of July/August 06," Fitcher confirms.

Asked about the five-year plan, she cites introducing the company to the marketplace and securing a large customer base as a premium accessory supplier as primary goals. ■

