

## Small Business – Big Dreams

DVD store owner, 30-year-old Layla Robinson is no stranger to the DVD rental industry.

In her mid-20s, Layla worked as a customer service assistant for a movie rental franchise. She developed lasting relationships with her customers, and found that she could never visit the grocery store without being recognized as ‘that girl from the video shop.’

More recently, Layla has been employed by local exporters, Peterson Portable Sawmills as their Marketing Manager. Not only did Layla design advertisements, plan marketing strategies and help re-vamp their website, but she was also chosen to represent the company at international trade shows. “Demonstrating at shows was a great break from sitting in front of my computer,” Layla says. “It also meant that I got to work face to face with our customers, and that was the best part.”

With no tertiary education and average high school exam results, Layla doubted she would ever become a business owner. But she says that everyone has a turning point. “For me, it was taking the chance and applying for the Marketing Assistant job advertised by Petersons in the local paper. I never thought I’d get the job,” Layla admitted. “But they gave me a chance and I worked hard and learned a lot along the way.”

It was because of her love of good customer relations, marketing and movies that Layla decided to open her own movie rental and retail store.

For most people, the idea of running their own business seems like a pipe dream. But Layla says that those people can make their dreams reality. “This was something I planned to do later on, like in my 40s. But I thought, what the hell, I’ll make it happen now.”

“Dreams can become reality; they just take time and a lot of hard work.”

Having the idea to open MovieTime™ in Ngongotaha came to Layla four years ago while living in the village. “Ngongotaha has got such great atmosphere,” Layla said. “It’s a busy place, with great people, constant foot-traffic and steady growth and I knew I could open a shop that locals would love.”

Layla got information about starting a small business from helpful New Zealand based websites that offer free advice, business starter booklets and free training seminars. “The New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE) website is a gem,” said Layla. “There’s an unlimited amount of free advice available from there, and it even links you to other helpful business web sites.”

The most important thing about starting a new business is preparation, and having used 'Planning for Success' - the free Business Plan booklet and template she found on the NZTE website - Layla certainly feels prepared.

"Spending time developing my business plan enabled me to fully research my potential customers, address any concerns about the movie rental industry, and my competitors, and think of unique ways to stand out above my competitors."

Bouncing ideas off the people she knows has also been an integral part of Layla's preparation. "My best mate was putting her business plan together at the same time I was, so we shared each others ideas and brainstormed a bit. Her positive reassurance definitely pushed aside any second thoughts I was having," admits Layla. "Without the support from friends and family, I don't think I would have come this far so quickly."

One of the most important steps of a creating a business plan is Market Research. Using the government's Statistics website, Layla gathered most of the evidence she needed to prove that a DVD rental/retail store would work in her market area.

Not relying solely on the work of others to cement her ideas, Layla also conducted her own telephone survey of the Ngongotaha area, asking for the public's rental habits, genre preferences, and Internet capabilities. One of her industry related questions asked if the resident was a member of an online movie rental company.

"There is a lot of talk on the Internet about online rental companies taking over the industry. However, my research showed very clearly that wasn't the case – not in Ngongotaha anyway," reports Layla. In fact, only one out of 100 people have thought about becoming, or are already members of, an online DVD rental store.

"With online renting, customers aren't able to choose a movie they feel like watching *that day*, they end up spending a lot of time at the post office and their letterboxes, and they are only allocated a few at a time - it's just not a very flexible arrangement."

Even with this local evidence, Layla has future-proofed her store "just in case." The software that she uses to run her business's website has a 24-hour turnaround from being a database of the physical store's movies, to being a fully operational online rental website. "I doubt I'll ever use that feature, but it's all about preparation, for now, and the future," she said.

Opening a franchised store was one of the options Layla weighed up when she decided to start her business, but she decided against it. She didn't want to *join* a franchise, she wanted to start one. "I'm not opening a shop and hoping for the

best, I've got tons of great ideas, lots of passion and heaps of energy to put into this shop. I know my market, I know the industry and I know what's missing from it," she said.

"There are plenty of Independent movie rental stores around the country that are very successful, mainly because of their dedication to customer service, and the fact that they offer that little something extra."

With a large range of new DVDs for rental and sale, hand-picked for local movie lovers, Layla promises that customers are sure to find what they're looking for when they visit her store, MovieTime™, and if they don't – she will find it for them.

The store is a movie fan's delight, with official Movie Merchandise for sale including playing cards, stickers, signs, T-shirts posters and more. MovieTime™ also stocks a range of signed merchandise from production company, View Askew Productions, famous for its edgy 'cult' comedies; DOGMA, Clerks and Clerks II, Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back, Chasing Amy and Mallrats.

"Our priority at MovieTime™, is customer service and interaction. When someone walks into MovieTime™ Ngongotaha, we want them to feel fully immersed in movies – so we've rolled out the red carpet, literally."

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