

## Work Life Balance Award Entrant: GrownUps

Two years ago, business was tough for Internet-based company GrownUps. By transforming the office-based business into a work-from-home operation, the team is now more productive, stable and happy. Recently the business was actually sold.

The year 2014 was a time of natural staff attrition so was an opportunity to look at how to work differently. And so to achieve improved work life balance, it was decided staff could work from wherever was most convenient for each other and provided they were able to check in a couple of times each day, provide the work that was required, then hours were completely flexible around children, family, sport, lifestyle, holidays etc.

GrownUps is a lifestyle website and social club for over 50 year olds, and as an online business, it really doesn't matter where a person is, as long as there is an internet connection.

The change has working exceptionally well. With a small team, it was relatively easy to set up as it seemed like a natural progression at the time. The team, which includes mothers with young children, suggested what would work best for them, and now produce more than 35 articles/items each week for the website, compared (to) with seven before the transition. Average monthly advertising sales have gone up considerably.

The team meets roughly once a month. Everyone has learned each other's jobs to enough of a degree they can cover each other. "We've upskilled as we all know a little bit about each other's roles and can step in at any time," says Richard.

"As long as everything gets done, then we're all happy and the business works."

The business has now kept the same team over that two year period. "We seem to all feel more successful that we're getting plenty done. We know how to laugh."

Work time is no longer being wasted on the road. Richard's former business partner Garth Hill used to have to travel up to three hours (1.5 hrs each way) to and from work in particularly bad traffic. Now there is no travel time and he can arrange meetings whenever suits him, around the traffic.

Staff are, despite geographical distance, more connected. "We are more in touch with what might be going on in each other's worlds and hence we are more empathetic. Life throws you curveballs sometimes...we just work around it," says Richard.

There has also been a health benefit, as everyone is exercising more. It's no problem to do this during the day, as long as it doesn't interrupt work flow.

Team members have however found they tend to work more at night now, once the kids are in bed, however this seems to work.

The payoff is more 'time away." For example during school holidays, team members can go to different places however continue to work and no one would know the difference. For customers, location doesn't impact their business whatsoever.

Richard and his original business partner Shane Bradley's idea behind Grown Ups when they launched in 2006 was to service over 50s in New Zealand, by providing a free website full of useful and interesting information in one place. The site now has one of the highest percentages of visitors in the over fifties demographic.

By adopting a flexible approach to delivering that service, Richard and Shane's original vision is set to grow, especially with the new owners. "Business has never been in better shape and we're looking at how we can extend everyone's hours, to be able to grow the business even more," he says.