

Business Spotlight: Nina's Chocolates

An interview with George Magganas, Director

Sum up your business in one sentence.

Nina's Chocolates manufactures an extensive range of award winning handmade chocolates.

How did your business come about?

Upon graduating with a Bachelor of Science, majoring in food technology in 1976, I worked for the major, multinational food company, Unilever. My main role there was product development and I was also the Technical Services Manager for the non-retail side of the business. I spent 20 years with Unilever including spending a number of years in sales and marketing roles.

Unilever afforded me many overseas courses and learning experiences. Visits to handmade chocolate operations in Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, England, Canada and the United States, nurtured a passion for handmade chocolate manufacture. Whilst working at Unilever, I began making chocolate as a hobby which grew so much that I established a mini chocolate lab in a spare room in my home, where I practiced and perfected the 'art'.

It was always my intention to commercially make chocolates when I retired, but at the age of 42, my plans were fast-forwarded and Nina's Chocolates commenced operation in December 1995. The company is named after our two daughters Nicole and Natalie.

We produce approximately 120 different fine handmade chocolates, which are made to produce a "wow" taste sensation in the form of fresh cream/liqueur truffles, pralines, and soft-center creams just to name a few. Our production is located in Gynea, New South Wales. We have created a 'chocolate theatre', as our retail store is incorporated within the actual manufacturing facility, which allows customers a 'birds eye' view of our operation.

My wife, May, who is an accountant and who also worked with Unilever, has played an integral role in the success of our business. The synergies between May (accountancy, administration and retail flare) and myself (food



A chocolate creation by Nina's Chocolates

technology, production, marketing and sales) has held us in good stead for the venture that we embarked on. Nina's is very much a family business, which has drawn on the strength and commitment from our children who continue to play an active role in its operation.

Having decided the quality criteria and type of product range we wanted to produce, we originally opted for

relatively small and affordable premises. We chose prestigious "target consumers" such as five-star hotels. After gaining these customers, we utilised them as referees to speak of our quality and service levels to other potential wholesale customers.



Nina's Chocolates retail shop, Gynea Bay Rd, Gynea

We continued to operate in these premises for three years until the growing wholesale customer base necessitated that we move to bigger premises. Although larger wholesale-orientated manufacturing facilities were available, we decided to move to our current site, which afforded us opportunity to gain retail exposure and to showcase the Nina's brand.

Nina's Chocolates has gained much recognition during the last nine years and we have won numerous prestigious awards, which are listed below:

- NSW Champion of Champions in the category of Manufacturing 2003, 2004
- 12 Medals in 2003 Sydney Royal Easter Show (1 Gold, 5 Silver, 6 Bronze)
- 23 Medals in 2004 Sydney Royal Easter Show (4 Gold, 9 Silver, 10 Bronze)
- "Most Successful Chocolate Exhibitor 2004" Sydney Royal Easter Show 2004
- 28 Medals in 2004 Royal Melbourne Dairy Produce Show (8 Gold, 20 Silver)
- "Most Successful Chocolate Exhibitor 2004" at the Royal Melbourne Dairy Produce Show

Where do you believe the confectionery industry is heading?

I believe the high-quality end of the handmade confectionery industry is experiencing a significant increase in demand. It is businesses such as ours that have positioned themselves to service this niche (both in retail and wholesale venues) that will prosper over the coming years. Although many more "hopefuls" are being attracted to this niche, the "pie" has grown and there is room for all, providing high-quality standards are met.

What do you love most about running your own business?

The fact that through endless hard work we have been able, as a family during the last nine years, to establish a successful business that is highly regarded and is so personally gratifying. I also love the fact that my passion, which is contagious, has positively affected our staff to treat

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