

5 MINUTES WITH STEVE KEIL

OVER THE PAST 15 YEARS, THE LASER GROUP HAS EXPERIENCED STRONG GROWTH IN THE ELECTRICAL AND PLUMBING SECTORS. MANAGING DIRECTOR STEVE KEIL SPEAKS TO PAUL SKELTON ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF A MEMBERSHIP NETWORK AND THE IMPORTANCE OF GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY.

PAUL SKELTON: HOW MANY LASER MEMBERS ARE THERE IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND?

STEVE KEIL: At the moment there are 108 members in Australia and 100 members in NZ, and we're actively looking for new members to join our team – we signed on 19 new members last financial year. These members cross both the electrical and plumbing industries, with a 70/30 split in Australia and a 60/40 split in NZ favouring electricians.

PS: YOU CALL YOURSELF A MEMBERSHIP GROUP RATHER THAN A FRANCHISE, WHY IS THAT?

SK: We work quite hard to foster the concept that each individual member is part of an exclusive club, rather than just being a franchisee. This is mainly because when people think of franchises in the trades they think of micro businesses – i.e. sole traders that work out of a van.

The average number of employees working at any Laser member business around the country would be around 12, but we have members that employ up to 60 people or as few as four site workers.

PS: WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A POTENTIAL LASER MEMBER?

SK: The people we look for have already been in business for a number of years and have a good name and reputation in the industry; we're really built on the premise of conversion franchising.

The companies that seek out membership have typically grown to a size where they are struggling to keep control of the business and they need some help, or they are ready to grow to a new business level that they are

unfamiliar with. That's where we come in.

We help them by providing a national marketing platform, business systems and tools including our proprietary software, business coaching and support.

In return, we want people who fit our culture and values so we can be of value to them. We don't want someone who is going to knock heads with us at every turn.

PS: WHAT BUSINESS TOOLS DO YOU OFFER YOUR MEMBERS THAT AID IN THE DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS OF THEIR BUSINESSES?

SK: We've actually just upgraded our software system to be fully in the cloud.

Our solution is now a combination of a white label product that is designed to suit electrical and plumbing contracting businesses, developed by simPRO, and Xero to run their accounts. We also use Google Apps for Business across the network.

PS: HOW CAN YOUR MEMBERS LEVERAGE THE NETWORK OF 208 OTHER MEMBER COMPANIES IN THEIR OWN BUSINESS?

SK: One of the most valuable things we can offer our members is being part of an allied network that allows them to collaborate and not compete with other Laser members. This also allows them to be nationally competitive; recently, one of our members in Melbourne won a contract to do 180 connections all around the country. Part of the reason he won was because he had access to the Laser network, which made it possible for him to fulfil that contract.



Steve Keil, Managing Director of the Laser Group.

PS: AS THE NETWORK IS SO IMPORTANT, WHAT STEPS DO YOU TAKE TO FOSTER RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN YOUR MEMBERS?

SK: We have several events every year that help to bring our members together while also offering education sessions they can use to build their businesses. Each year we also hold an international conference that allows our members to get together and network, listen to guest keynotes and be exposed to our supplier partners.

This year we held our conference in Auckland. More than 450 delegates attended the three day event, which included various workshops, a trade expo hall and keynote presentation from guest speakers of varying backgrounds and experiences. ■

The 2014 Laser Group international conference will be held on the Gold Coast.

Laser Group
www.lasergroup.com.au