

## kikki.K [today]

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**John Bryce [CFO kikki.K]**



### CASE STUDY

#### **Simplifying Support and Management of a Complex ICT Infrastructure**

Style, innovation, commitment and an entrepreneurial attitude. They are just some of the factors that form the foundation of success for one the undisputed great Australian business success stories of the past decade – kikki.K.

Founded in 2002 by Kristina ‘Kikki’ Karlsson and Paul Lacy, and on track to reach 100 Australian and international stores by the end of 2013, kikki.K is widely recognised as the destination point for devotees of stylish stationery. Behind that stylish stationery and entrepreneurial success, though, there is the serious side to managing a booming business; and entrenched within that is one of the major stumbling blocks for small and medium businesses – Information Communications Technology (ICT).

#### **“We Knew We Needed Help”**

With Kristina focused on driving the company’s creativity and style, it was Paul, now CEO of the company which employs over 400 hundred people, who assumed the role of Business and ICT Manager.

*“In the first couple of years as we saw the potential for the business, we recognised that ICT was going to play a major role in our success,” Paul states.*

“But like most small businesses, we didn’t have the resources needed to employ and manage an ICT support team, even though we knew full well we had to have one. Essentially, we knew we needed help.”

#### **A Microsoft Recommendation**

Never one to shy away, Paul contacted Microsoft directly and explained the challenge facing kikki.K. “Microsoft understood precisely what I was looking for, both in technology and support,” he says, “and within a few days we’d been put in contact with itro.”

Following an in-depth audit of kikki.K’s existing ICT setup and meetings to gain a full understanding of the kikki.K business model, itro introduced the cost-effective yet powerful Microsoft Small Business Server (SBS). Along with that, kikki.K appointed itro as the single-point of contact for its Australian and international ICT management and support requirements.

#### **Avoiding the Costly Alternative**

In commenting on the rationale behind the long term relationship between kikki.K and itro, kikki.K Chief Financial Officer John Bryce makes note of two key points: cost and simplicity. “As the company has grown,” he says, “itro has been with us every step of the way with a full understanding of the business and a commitment to supporting the increasingly complex ICT needs of the business.”

John goes on to explain that if kikki.K were to employ and manage its own IT staff, meeting the same levels of support afforded by itro, the company’s ICT management and support budget would experience an immediate and ongoing blow-out of at least 300 percent.

*“We’d need at least four personnel to provide the same levels of support,” he says.*

“In addition to that, by leaving the responsibility of the ICT staff training and skill-sets to itro, we’ve totally eliminated the ongoing requirements to train personnel and manage replacements during holiday periods. It also means we never have to concern ourselves about training personnel to replace those who might leave through normal staff attrition.”

#### **Supporting Business Growth**

Throughout the course of kikki.K’s rapid and sustained expansion, itro’s proactive approach to managing the company’s ICT has, according to Paul, remained fundamental to smooth growth. This was particularly evident when business staff numbers and IT needs outgrew those that could be supported by Microsoft Small Business Server (SBS).

As a result of constantly monitoring kikki.K's business and ICT environment, itro was able to identify the need to transition beyond SBS well before it became a business-critical requirement. This enabled both companies ample time to plan for and implement a server environment that would more adequately support kikki.K's future ICT demands.

According to Paul, regardless of the fact that itro was implementing new servers, running Windows Server, Exchange Server and SQL Server, the transition from SBS was so seamless as to be all but transparent to the business. "itro's understanding of our business and, importantly, Microsoft technologies, meant the move to dedicated servers took place at the right time for our business and without any disruption at all to operations.

"If we had been in the position of having to do it ourselves or bring in someone who didn't have the intimate knowledge of our business, there's no doubt in my mind that we would have experienced disruptions – and substantial costs."

#### **"For us, it's all so simple!"**

For many growing businesses, commissioning IT for new premises generally brings with it an unwelcome logistical load on top of what will already be heavy requirements in employing and training staff, outfitting premises and a myriad of other things. For kikki.K, though, it's nothing more than an email to itro.

John explains: "When we're several months out from commissioning a new boutique, we give itro all the details such as location – and that can be anywhere in Australia or world – size and opening

date. From that point on, it's really a case of set and forget. We know full well that itro will do everything that's necessary from an ICT perspective to have that store ready for opening day."

In the background, that "set and forget" approach by kikki.K is the trigger for a series of highly coordinated events and projects that are critical to the success of an on-time opening. At the initial stage, itro configures and tests all the required equipment at its high tech workshop; and it's more than just a couple of Point of Sale terminals.

Specially selected HP desktop computers are commissioned. Point of Sale software from Retail Directions is installed and configured. Card payment facilities and data security systems are brought on-line. Cash drawers, receipt printers and a multi-function device are connected. Even the in-store stereo system and connected Apple iPod are set up and run through their paces to ensure everything works in precise accord with the standard kikki.K retail boutique model.

Beyond that, itro team members organise for the installation of telecommunications facilities and liaise with shop-fitters and shopping centre management.

*"We realise all too well that there's an enormous amount of work involved in setting up the ICT for each store," John states. "But this is where itro's role in our business is so crucial. For them it's complex. For us, it's all so simple!"*

#### **Ensuring Smooth Day-to-Day Operations**

In the real world of ICT, things do go wrong on occasion, whether caused by equipment, software or even users; and it's on those occasions that itro's on-demand support for kikki.K is pivotal to ensuring smooth day-to-day operations.

While itro's core expertise lies in the broad range of Microsoft technologies, personnel are also trained in a wide range of technologies to support their use by clients across a wide range of industries. In the case of kikki.K, that means being able to provide first-level support for Retail Directions' retail management software and Quest payment software along with full support for Microsoft solutions.

Of particular note is the advantage itro's formal relationship with Microsoft gives to kikki.K in maintaining their standardised Microsoft technologies. In rare instances where support for a Microsoft product requires escalation to Microsoft specialists, it's the itro/Microsoft partnership that underpins rapid problem resolution.

*"For everyone in the company, and regardless of the problem, there's the knowledge that there is a single, responsive and local point of contact for all ICT support issues," John says.*

"And that's a major contributing factor to having full ICT management and support that proves to be better, at many levels, than a dedicated in-house team of IT professionals."