

PARTNERSHIP

THE BUSINESS OF LOVE

FIND A NICHE AND OWN IT – JUST ASK THE GUYS BEHIND BEAU BRUMMELL.

There's often an assumption that niche businesses are too small to warrant any heady investment. But a smaller industry can often mean less competition – which in turn can prompt a more immediate cut-through.

It's key to the dramatic success of Beau Brummell – Australia's first dedicated gay dating agency. The idea for the concept first flirted with founder Vinko Anthony (right), a 45-year-old personal assistant to Lucy Turnbull (yes, the PM's wife) and manager of the Turnbull & Partners office, over dinner in 2011. Speaking across the table to a friend, who operated an introduction service for heterosexuals, Anthony was immediately smitten by the future for such a prospect, especially as there was no similar operation in Australia. Two months later, with three maxed credit cards, Anthony and his partner (business and personal), Andrea Zaza, 38, opened the doors to gay men seeking love.

Starting with just 16 customers, Beau Brummell currently has more than 900 across Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, with clients paying well into four figures for membership that ends on entering a relationship of 12 months.

"To mix finance and emotions is so complex," offers Anthony. "In the beginning, I researched other agencies – both straight and gay-focused – in Hong Kong, London and San Francisco to work out our style of memberships. In the first week, we had to scrap the model of tiered memberships that we'd initially selected. We had to work with everyone the same way."

MENTOR

STEVE JOBS' IDOL WAS INTEL FOUNDER ANDY GROVE, WHOM HE CALLED FOR ADVICE BEFORE RETURNING TO APPLE IN 1997. GROVE DIED IN MARCH THIS YEAR, AGED 79.



A willingness to adapt has been crucial to the business's success, but at its core is the unwavering belief in the value of the service Beau Brummell provides.

"It's because we're determined," says Anthony. "We started when apps such as Grindr and Tinder were taking off, and we could have gone down that route, and had thousands of clients, but it's not the concept we believe in. For us, it's about spending time with prospective clients. We need to know whether they're the right fit with us and established clients before we take them on."

Anthony and Zaza's method for sharing their concept has also remained constant, choosing traditional mainstream media outlets rather than focusing on gay press – part of that initial credit card debt incurred by taking out full-page ads in national mastheads such as *Qantas* magazine.

"It's important because it shows the way that we view our own relationship, and the relationships of our clients – we have nothing to be ashamed of and nothing to hide. All relationships are the same," states Zaza.

The majority of Beau Brummell's clients are aged between 33 and 48, with all new members having to 'date' Anthony and Zaza at a series of dinners and meetings before being matched with potential partners.

"We've had businesses approach us about franchise opportunities, but they can't believe the level of contact we maintain with our clients," says Anthony. "Sometimes I wish we had some real competition in the market so that people could compare what we offer with someone else. I'm confident of our high level of service."

High client-facing contact is something the pair's keen to maintain, even as they push into the Perth market, with an aim to grow their client base to more than 2000 in the next two years.

"We've calculated that we have a 79 per cent success rate [in matching people]," says Anthony. "More importantly, of the couples we have matched, I can only think of a handful that haven't worked out."

"And they came back," adds Zaza. beaubrummellintroductions.com

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