



IT'S ALL ABOUT REPUTATION AND BRANDING

AS MANAGING DIRECTOR OF TRARALGON BASED CREDITCOLLECT, MARK ANSWERTH HAS ESTABLISHED BOTH HIMSELF AND HIS FLOURISHING BUSINESS AS A PLACE "WHERE OTHERS WANT TO WORK".

A dynamic personality with a great love for his work and a wide variety of sports, Mark's infectious enthusiasm for an otherwise denigrated industry is a bright light within Gippsland's business community.

According to Mark, he works in the mercantile industry and together with a nationwide group of similarly like minded operators, he is strident in his aim to increase the levels of professionalism while reducing the presence of "a rogue element".

CreditCollect specializes in collecting debts for local governments, major corporates, major utilities, medium size commercial clients and smaller enterprises. Established in November 2001, the company is now gaining strong market share both throughout Victoria and nationally, competing successfully against many of its bigger national competitors. CreditCollect is also doing some work in New Zealand for an Australian-based international company.

Mark started in the industry 10 years prior to forming CreditCollect, working initially with Laurens and Co (previously known as George Laurens) and for RML (Receivables Management Limited) following extensive widespread industry consolidation.

"Actually, towards the end of my employment in that era, I closed the local Traralgon office for RML - this being the old Laurens & Co office I used to manage," he said. "But I knew a market existed for such services and the rest is history - as they always say.

"We began with myself and two staff; now we have 12 staff and growing. Clients have confidence in our service because of the people who provide it.

"I am conscious there is a public perception that we're involved in a cloak and dagger business. This is incorrect and we are service orientated, aiming to resolve

financial issues as they come to hand. Sub-contracted licensed agents do the field calls and any relevant information collecting we feel is necessary to assist our clients.

"Every case is different and therefore is treated with individualized respect. We are not a call centre where faceless, unsympathetic operators answer phones. Ours is a personalized service providing credit management for clients while playing an instrumental role in credit education for their customers. We want to be recognised for our high level of service delivery, if we get this right the results will take care of themselves.

"CreditCollect is very proud of its record of not losing a major client over the past nine years which is very unique in an industry that has a high client 'churn'. Client retention is a key focus for our organisation and is a major factor behind our on-going success. The key to this was employing a full time national business manager, Jason Dowling, five years ago, with an emphasis on delivering a high level of customer service whilst at the same time growing the client base."

Mark said when debts were "old", customers tended to think they had "got away with it". His affectionate term for the mercantile industry is "the capper", quietly dismissing another unkind perception - that it's full of angry people.

"Those facing debt problems are really seeking assistance. We have a job to do and my dedicated staff understand it is important to be fair and equitable therefore underscoring our personalized approach."

Mark acknowledges the invaluable support received from his wife, Annie, who works part-time in the business. The nine-year journey has not been without long hours and various other challenges. It was not handed to Mark; he has built this business on pure hard work. Annie has been there behind him all the time.

"Our staff must be good communicators, with well developed telephone skills albeit there is some face-to-face contact which often leads into financial

from within the business is a key to ensuring our growth with our current office manager, Nicole Campbell, starting out as our receptionist seven years ago. Since this time two other past receptionists have been promoted through the ranks to more senior positions.

"They know judgments have to be made. They realize our client relationships are vital as are the relationships with customers of our clients. It's a balancing act and we remain mindful of what we do as all we can do. CreditCollect removes the emotion between client and customer. The emotion is outsourced to us.

counselling. Our track record in collecting outstanding debt certainly enhances our reputation.

"Our branding is CreditCollect - a rather unique name in which we tell our clients and their customers what we do. We collect outstanding credit. In turn our clients are seen in a good light because they are connected with us. Also, we are establishing a strong reputation for collection of tier two debts where another agency was unsuccessful and we have been contacted to take over.

"My staff has been extremely important underpinning the success of CreditCollect. Their passion and loyalty make the business what it is today. I believe we now have been tagged as an employer of choice which is quite flattering. Promoting

"I think credit facility services need to be well structured to prevent, or at least, alleviate situations from becoming serious emotional contests. We want to be part of the solution and not part of the problem."

The ACCC is Australia's watchdog keeping an eye on the mercantile industry which is going through some significant changes with a new licence regime being introduced. For Mark, it has been "a fantastic journey".

"I have found it quite rewarding particularly in helping clients and watching my staff grow in confidence and capabilities."

CreditCollect takes pride in acknowledging it generates significant income from outside Gippsland, putting this back into the local economy and supporting local events. CreditCollect has for several years now provided sponsorship to major sporting events such as the Tour of Gippsland (cycling) and Traralgon Racing Club as well as the North Gippsland Football Netball League, Churchill Football Netball Club, local schools and junior sporting events. CreditCollect has recently committed to a sponsorship deal with Gippsland Sports Academy further highlighting its commitment to local sport. Mark is also a member of the VECCI Small Business Council.

MARK ANSWERTH OF CREDITCOLLECT: "WE WANT TO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION AND NOT PART OF THE PROBLEM."

Will your business survive the "Credit Crunch"? Has your business got a strong cash flow?

If you said no to either of these questions then you need to call CreditCollect, Gippsland's premier credit management & debt collection service.

At CreditCollect we tailor our collection processes to suit our clients requirements. So, if slow paying customers are causing cash flow issues for your business call CreditCollect, and have the experts get things back on track for you.

 **creditcollect**

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