



BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

Words Irena Brooks
Photo Rob tucker

The odds for business partnerships lasting longer than five years are pretty long. Yet John Christiansen and Jack Kurta have thrived since they took over Harcourts Taranaki back in 2004.

Clearly defined roles have played a big part in ensuring this partnership is one that has beaten the odds.

"There's only one leader here," says Jack "and that's John. We may be partners but you can't have more than one leader. Plus I really enjoy the sales side of things. I'm more the team leader and support the staff. We found our niche pretty quickly really – we complement each other."

After five years owning Harcourts Taranaki, the pair is now confident with their roles as business owners and leaders.

They regularly attend business development workshops run by Harcourts where the various franchisees share their initiatives.

John firmly believes it's their efforts to keep ahead of the game that have ensured Harcourts' continued success.

"Things like our Blueprint brand and magazine, the Harcourts website ... all those things were done before it became the industry norm. We've worked on delivering quality product. We know what's required to sell property and that's what we focus on."

The pair even admits to still having a chuckle about the odd thing they've contemplated that probably wasn't such a great idea.

"We also pride ourselves on the culture here," says Jack Kurta. It's the key to this business.

"This is the third franchise I've owned," adds Jack "and this is far and away the best.

It's the support from Harcourts that makes the biggest difference, with reach, education and back-up.

"Harcourts is always good to us, innovative and provide us with resources to help you get where you are going," says John. "As the largest real estate franchise in New Zealand the referral base is huge."

Harcourts also has the biggest residential market share in Taranaki. The www.taranakiharcourts.co.nz

website has 6,500 – 7,000 unique visitors every month while the national Harcourts website has more hits than open2view.

It is also the only real estate company that has an academy offering a New Zealand real estate certificate and diplomas in real estate.

"We're nurturing leaders in the industry."

"We also have great performers on our team," says Jack.

"Glenn Green was Number 2 internationally in the 2008/09 year – out of 4000 Harcourts salespeople, and he's from our Bell Block office, where there's only 1500 houses."

Jenny Bunn from the Inglewood/Stratford office is at number 26 internationally, while Jack Kurta's at 34 and Lisa Ratahi is number 18 with several more salespeople from the New Plymouth office featuring amongst the top 100.

Bruce Woodhead is consistently amongst the Top 5 commercial agents in the whole country.

"We have a good blend of experience, enthusiasm and youth," believes Jack. "We're quite eclectic, which is good, as it injects some energy."

Though Harcourts agents earn more than the industry average, earnings are only part of the reason the company has experienced low staff turnover. Jack and John believe the culture at Harcourts plays a huge part and that the Harcourts brand helps attract the right people. "The big key though, is, we have fun," says John.

"We have a family here," says Jack.

"In times of adversity, we've backed the team and in return, they've shown us loyalty."

Harcourts Taranaki has also invested in three Joint Venture Partnerships – with Graeme Rogers at the Bell Block office and Jenny Bunn at the Stratford/Inglewood office and Rodney Lay in Rentals.

"They run pretty much autonomously," says John. "They are so good at what they do we don't have

to oversee them. They pretty much dominate their respective markets.

With three licensed auctioneers, two people in their Mortgage Express division and another two in their Insurance Express section, plus a dedicated rental branch, Harcourts' growth has stemmed from trying to make the business of buying and selling homes easier for their customers.

"The real estate market's very active at the moment – particularly at the lower price brackets – you can't get enough stock," says Jack. "We're experiencing multi offers coming in on a lot of properties."

First home-buyers are also making a major comeback as they can buy a home for the same amount they're paying out in rent.

"I think Taranaki is insulated from the downturn other parts of the country are experiencing – we've just continued to prosper," says John.

"People now see New Plymouth as an attraction and events centre.

There are rub-offs from that for people like us. People will now buy property here as an investment.

"Also, since 9/11, we've had ex-pats coming home. Normally they'd go to maybe Auckland or Wellington but now they're coming home to New Plymouth and finding work. It's all helped our local economy, that's for sure. Made the place quite cosmopolitan."

A shared passion for Taranaki, sports, family and the outdoors mean these two have plenty to talk about besides work. But it's evident that even after five years of being in business together, these two are planning on plenty more years yet. ●●

Harcourts
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