



Bryan and Gary Sher: "We look forward to greater brand awareness this year amongst Australian consumers," says Gary Sher.

BROTHERS IN BUSINESS

Toy & Hobby Retailer editor **Stuart Loch** talks to Gary and Bryan Sher, joint managing directors of Sydney's competitive business Protoys, the owner of Jolly KidZ.

THR: Protoys is relatively new to the industry – how long has the company been operating? What were your intentions in establishing the business?

GARY SHER: Firstly we would like to thank you for this interview and the opportunity it presents in telling the market about who we are and what we do. The two of us established Protoys seven years ago in 2003. We started in a cramped two by two metre, self-built office with one phone line between us! Our intention was to start small and build a stable, healthy business we could be proud of 15 years later.

THR: You come from a family business that's been operating the Uncle Pete's toy stores for around 25 years. What was it like growing up in a family that owned a toy store business? It must have been a rewarding introduction to the toy industry?

BRYAN SHER: You may think that as a youngster it was free toys all year round, but that wasn't quite right. Our parents always made us save and pay 50 per cent for anything we wanted. At age 18, we were each presented with a shoebox filled with cash from all the past purchases we made. So yes, it was free after all, but the lessons of hard work, saving and pursuing goals were deeply entrenched – valuable lessons that we put into practise at Protoys. Of course we spent much time in the stores, worked the warehouse at Christmas time and became good mates with all the reps. The toy industry was in our blood from a young age.

THR: How will these experiences working in the Uncle Pete's business help in the development of Protoys?

BS: A great advantage we gained is the ability to see things from a retailer's perspective. From pricing to logistics, to ranging, to marketing – it is all done through the lens of a retailer. We also attained a strong sense of product and value – knowledge, which can only be learnt from time spent working in the industry. In saying that we are still young and have much to learn.

THR: Is there a particular motto or work ethic that Protoys works by?

GS: Our key value is "think". We encourage everyone in our business to be dynamic, different and challenge the status quo – to understand our customers, our products and the market – this attitude ensures that in every aspect of our organisation we are always doing business better. The other fundamental value is that 'customers always come first'. We are a customer-centric organisation and we put all our effort into ensuring our customers have a wonderful experience with us. Granted it's not always

smooth sailing, but in such situations we endeavour to help our customers quickly and efficiently.

THR: You bought the Jolly KidZ business in early 2009, how did that acquisition come about and what plans do you have in developing the Jolly KidZ children's furniture business over the next 12 months?

GS: We were looking for an opportunity to create our own proprietary brand and through an old friendship with the past Jolly KidZ owner the acquisition came about. The long-term plan for Jolly KidZ is to transform it into an established, well-known consumer brand. The release of our 2010 catalogue and consolidation of the range is the first step. Our current focus is on tables and chairs, playpens and mats, high chairs and easels. We have a great vision for the brand but know its going take hard work and help from our customers to get there.

THR: How many Jolly KidZ items will Protoys be releasing annually?

BS: During this calendar year we anticipate the release of three new products. We are also re-conditioning the existing range with improvements and innovations planned for release throughout the year. We are very excited about the new releases and look forward to both domestic and international customer support.

THR: What does the Jolly KidZ range offer that competitive children's furniture ranges don't?

BS: Many of the Jolly KidZ products are absolutely unique in their designs, for example the Jolly KidZ Versatile Playpen, MagicPanel Playpen and Resin Tables and Chairs. All our products are designed with a strong focus on practicality – something which often goes astray in competitor products. We aim to include a unique innovation in every Jolly KidZ product. For example the assembly speed and ease of our Smart and ToughTimber Table and Chairs, the thickness of our EVA Play Mats, etc. We have a strong emphasis on meeting all industry standards [even non-mandatory] as well as being consistent with anthropometric research [how body proportions relate to furniture]. With a long-term vision we are happy to invest in perfecting our products, well beyond mandatory expectations.

THR: How will you be promoting Jolly KidZ throughout 2010? What advertising is planned?

GS: We are involved in grass roots, viral-style marketing campaigns as well as network opinion leader campaigns. Coupled with the rollout of new packaging, new point-of-

