

HotBods Creatures

Susy Griffiths made the initial HotBods creatures for her daughter and then developed the business to fill a gap in the market — for a reheatable child's comforter and companion. Her company, HotBods Creatures, began trading in 1996 from a home-based office with a staff of just two when the company launched its first HotBods Bears through the 'Parents, Babies and Children's Expo' in Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. The response was overwhelming and, as word of the product spread, so did distribution. Since then it has grown to employ 12 people in the company's 320sq m warehouse and offices, 35 sewing contractors. By December 1997, over 30,000 HotBods creatures had been sold in Australia alone as a range of cute, cuddly, wheat-filled and scented creatures designed to be used as lovable, warm comforters, aromatherapy friends and therapeutic heat or chill packs.

Over 80 per cent of HotBods Creatures' production is for export and 75 percent of their revenue comes from exports to Japan, France, England, America, Canada, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Saudi Arabia and New Zealand. The HotBods Creatures head office, warehouse and distribution centre is based in Perth, Western Australia, and the company directly controls the manufacture of its products, both locally and overseas.

Susy recognised customer service as a key driver in their export so the company operates eight incoming phone lines with messages on hold, a 24-hour ordering service and a five-day worldwide delivery option. They also use the Internet for most correspondence with overseas customers, including orders.

The company's ongoing research in Australia and overseas showed that the initial target market, children, weren't the only ones using the bears. Adults were buying HotBods for themselves and as gifts for friends to be used as a therapeutic aid for muscular aches or for tension and headaches. On the basis of this research company founder, Susy Griffiths, set about developing and targeting the product to a new, broader market. To suit the needs of their Japanese customers Susy developed smaller and cuter designs, adopted specially dyed pastel colours and used towelling and velvet fabrics.

HotBods creatures are available Australia wide from retail outlets, such as chemists, baby boutiques, major department stores and selected mail order and catalogue companies. Hotbods Creatures uses distributors in each country so that they are fully represented in similar outlets overseas and also to protect the product and help with future development of the market. American import regulations on wheat, however, created a barrier there for two years. They particularly recognised the importance of exporting to their growth and success when their overseas distribution centres grew by 400 per cent in only eight months in the last financial year.

Check out their web site at www.hotbodscreatures.com.au .