

The Long Tall Clothing Company

This Melbourne company specialises in tall women's clothing. Sue (who is 6' 3") opened her Blackburn shop in November 1995 following years of frustration trying to find good quality clothes that fit well. In the first year Sue designed and sewed all the garments herself until she found a local manufacturer who was willing to make the small numbers needed at that time. Production increased over time with the introduction of mail-order facilities following publicity on television lifestyle programs and in women's magazines.

The www.longtallclothing.com.au web site was set up in 1997, after a customer from Monash University posted an article to the newsgroups alt.support.tall. Since Long Tall Clothing offers niche products, the size of its target market in Melbourne is limited. The company uses the Internet to overcome this barrier by reaching new markets across Australia and overseas. The on-line sales also help to smooth out the peaks and troughs of the fashion industry by selling overseas to Europe, Asia, the Pacific and North America from orders placed on their web site.

Over 70 per cent of Long Tall Clothing's sales are mail orders, phone orders or Internet orders and all the garments are still locally designed and manufactured. About 40 per cent of their revenue comes from exports, which has increased from 30 percent 12 months ago.

They have low waisted hipsters and bootlegs designed for younger customers through to tailored and casual pants and jeans for a wider range of ages. All pants and jeans have at least a 36" inseam, with some going to 38". They also have a selection of blouses, shirts, dresses and tops – all designed for tall ladies.

Sue and Peter, the Long Tall Clothing Company's owners, believe that the major threats to niche Australian clothing exports come from within the local company. They need to avoid the biggest threats of poor quality garments, poor stitching, fabric which shrinks or fades, poor customer service (not answering email queries promptly) and not sending orders promptly. It usually takes one day to fill an international web order and the same day for Australian orders.

With a good quality product, the Internet now allows businesses to sell directly to customers all around the world. But they must have something that no-one else has, or is at least a better product than is available elsewhere. Sue and Peter would consider selling through shops overseas in addition to direct sales to customers, but only on their terms.

The Long Tall Clothing Company does not need to make any adjustments to their designs for the overseas market. All their garments are designed for the Australian market, which they also sell overseas. The only extra things needed are detailed size charts (often Australian sizes are different from overseas sizes), clear prices in US dollars and a clear postage and refund policy.

One trade barrier the business faces is a 30 per cent duty on imported garments into the US and UK, which applies to orders over US\$200. However, Sue and Peter have found that most customers only want one or two pair of pants to make sure the fit and quality is right. Repeat orders are also usually for only two or three garments, which is usually under the US\$200 limit. The company also has a warning on its secure ordering page for purchases over A\$300

that customs duties may be payable. This warning only appears if the total value of the order is over A\$300.

Peter's experience in clothing sales over the Internet has led him to recently branch into web design for small business, opening new opportunities for growth. Visit the Long Tall Clothing Company at www.longtallclothing.com.au .