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Business topics

bv: By Business View

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The Rolling Fix story is the kind that fills every young (and not so young) entrepreneur's heart with hope.

A couple of years ago Cameron Harrison, a mechanical engineering graduate, was competing on the international cycling circuit. His friend and fellow cyclist, Thomas Treloar, was working for a web-development company. Harrison had worked at a bicycle shop while at university and had noted customers found it a hassle to get damaged bicycles to and from the premises.

So Harrison, despite having little spare time and even less capital, decided to start a mobile bicycle mechanic business in partnership with Treloar.

"It was a soft launch," he laughs. "Thomas created a Facebook page and a website. I started visiting customers at their houses and workplaces in between a job I had coaching rowers in the morning and night."

Harrison and Treloar's business, The Rolling Fix, took off. Though not without an early recalibration in customer acquisition strategy.

"We assumed people with expensive bikes would be our core customers. It turned out they usually had a strong relationship with their bicycle shop," Harrison says. "Given I'd competed internationally and Thomas had competed nationally we had some friends in the cyclist community who helped spread the word. Plus, we had mates from uni who were in the workforce and able to recommend us to their employer. We'd also set up at the base of the Harbour Bridge steps, where those riding into the city had to dismount."

"We'd offer to examine and service riders' bikes on the spot, or come to their workplace later and service it there. We've never spent money on conventional marketing. We figured that if the business had legs, it would grow on its own."

On your bike, thanks to The Rolling Fix

Before too long, some major corporations and office blocks had booked in visits from The Rolling Fix. By mid-2014, Harrison and Treloar had given up their cycling commitments and day jobs to concentrate on growing the business. By mid-2015, they were putting on contractors and expanding into Brisbane and Melbourne.

"The arrangements vary, though we always view the bike owner as the customer and the person we want to have recommending us to others," Harrison says. "Sometimes employers will pay for, say, 30 bikes to get a basic service. Alternatively, an employer or building manager may just arrange for us to turn up. Then it's up to the bike owner to meet the full cost of the service or repair, which can be up to \$500. We charge about the same as bike shops. We lease a commercial property in inner-city Sydney with a lock-up garage and space for six desks and invest in our online presence but don't have the overhead of leasing a retail property and trying to attract walk-ins."



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"We're servicing two NAB buildings in Sydney and one in Brisbane," he says. "That's how things often go, we start servicing one building and then the customer asks us to add other ones. When we're due for a visit at any of their buildings, NAB will advertise that on noticeboards and such. There will also be an EDM [Electronic Direct Mail] with a link to our booking form sent out. We keep a lot of data about what bike people ride, what work we've done on it in the past and what servicing it might require in the future."

"This system has made things easy for the customer who can drop their bike off without having to spend a lot of time backgrounding our staff, who have iPads so they can access all the relevant information on the cloud. And our vans are stocked with over 600 items meaning almost all problems can be fixed on the spot."

The logical fix

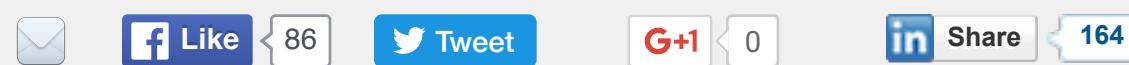
While there are other mobile bicycle mechanics, The Rolling Fix has cornered the market, or at least the corporate end of it, by taking a high-tech, professional approach.

"Mobile bike mechanics are typically one-man bands running a lifestyle business," Harrison says. "We're approaching it as a serious, scalable venture. Having established a presence in Australia's three largest cities, the next logical step is to source some capital and go national. The trick is to do that without losing the focus on customer service that's allowed us to keep so many of our original customers."

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