

# Developing a fashionable sense of self

■ Adam Orlando

## PROBLEM SOLVING

**COMPANY:** S2

**BUSINESS:** Fashion label, concept store.

**PROBLEM:** Limited marketing budget.

**SOLUTION:** Using PR to reach target market.

A PASSION for colour, texture and form manifested itself early for Western Australian designer Chrissie Catling.

Having first studied interior design in the mid 1980s, the working mother found her calling in 2004 and decided to apply her artistic skill and a sharp eye for detail to fashion design.

Heading into its fifth year, her innovative store S2 is an inspired North Perth fashion boutique made for women Ms Catling says have a strong sense of self.

The store's collections are characterised by wide-leg pants, iconic circle and vixen dresses and layered pieces.

"I'm designing for intelligent, well-dressed women looking for something a little different," Ms Catling told *WA Business News*.

"Perth is full of women like this who often find themselves being dictated to rather than being encouraged to develop their own style.

"There are only a handful of boutiques in Perth that offer this kind of store environment and personal service."

With only a limited marketing budget, Ms Catling found the small business at the crossroads early on as she struggled to promote the S2

brand into the Perth marketplace.

Initially, she focused her attention on the development of my garments and wholesaling the label to buyers.

"I started from scratch and needed to raise awareness of my label but didn't have the budget to do so," Ms Catling said.

"When you are not yet established as a business and people don't know who you are, you need to raise your profile – but it's a catch 22.

"It was important for me to focus my efforts on building the range, as without a product you obviously have nothing to market."

She said the progress of S2 was slower than expected, with the business often missing opportunities to reach consumers.

"I couldn't reach my target market quickly enough and I knew I couldn't compete with fashion labels and design houses with mega budgets and high profile, consistent advertising campaigns," Ms Catling said.

"I'm an expert in design and fashion, certainly not in marketing or public relations. And I didn't really have an understanding of how to raise the profile of S2 without paid advertising.

"I did, however, remember that some of the biggest global brands such as The Body Shop have relied on public relations to gain and maintain profile."

Ms Catling employed communication and business advisory firm Rowland to put together a public relations strategy.

The process forced her to think about her target market, what the business had to offer, and how she wanted to shape the reputation of my business.

"They worked with me to develop a plan that incorporated an online presence, relationship building and media positioning," Ms Catling said. "Despite the fact that I have not committed any money to paid advertising, I have been involved in a range of strategic activities that



**STRATEGY:** Chrissie Catling knows the value of a targeted PR campaign. Photo: Grant Currall

have helped to position my label and the concept store."

The strategic media relations campaign not only raised awareness of S2, it made Ms Catling aware of the need to stick to her core business and

seek help in specialist areas.

The PR campaign has translated into more people visiting the store and as a consequence, increased sales.

"It is surprising the number of

people who tell me they saw S2 featured in the newspaper or heard about one of my personal shopper evenings even though I don't have an advertising presence," Ms Catling said.

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