

BUSINESS COACHING

Results by any other name ...

The economic crisis is set to be a boon to consulting firm as more businesses turn to advice

Niko Kloeten

Results by name, results by nature: business-coaching company Results Group is achieving the success it strives to help other businesses attain.

Its client businesses are growing at an average of 49% per year, according to managing director Ben Ridler, who joined the firm in 1997 and is now a majority shareholder.

And Results isn't doing too badly itself, having made it to ninth on this year's Deloitte Fast 50 index of the fastest-growing companies in New Zealand.

"We live what we teach," said Mr Ridler, adding that of the eight companies ahead in the list two of them were Results clients.

"But that means that seven companies in the top ten aren't our clients. There are some great businesses out there."

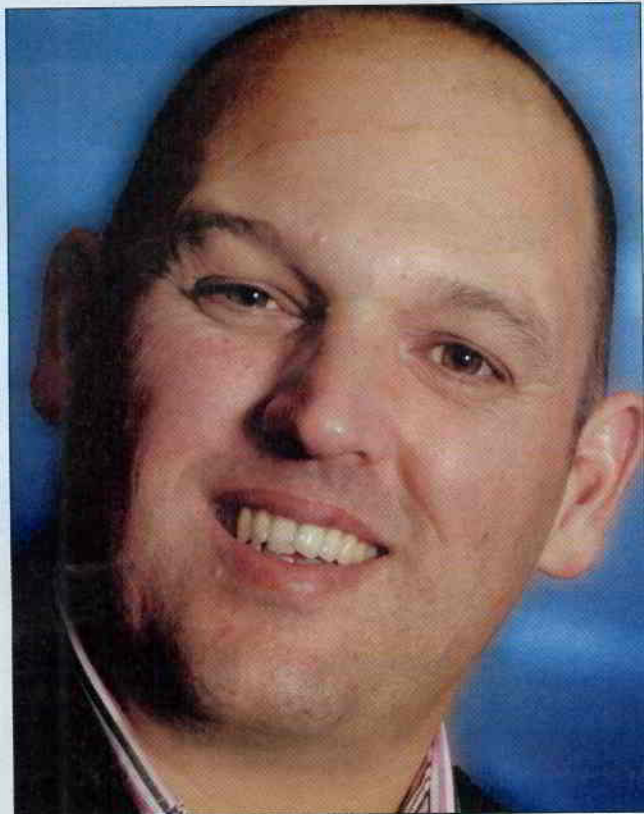
He's not satisfied with ninth either; he wants Results to be number one, and oddly enough, the recession may help the company achieve this.

Bane to so many other businesses, the economic crisis is a boon to Results, as desperate owners look to improve the performance of their businesses so they can survive the downturn.

But surely Results can't keep growing at this rate forever?

"I don't see why not," said Mr Ridler, who added that the company's potential for growth was nearly unlimited.

New Zealand is a world leader in business coaching,



BEN RIDLER: Business coaching is quite like sports coaching and Results is expanding its operations across the globe despite the downturn

an industry he described as being still in its infancy globally.

North America, for example, is "where New Zealand was four or five years ago" with regard to business coaching, and to tap into that huge market, Results formed a joint venture in Canada with Calgary-based Alignlink.

As well as being an access point to the continent, Alignlink brings experience coaching billion-dollar companies, which were relatively rare in little old New Zealand.

They've merged their business models: "They've brought to us a lot more strategic planning expertise, and working with bigger companies," Mr Ridler said.

"Ours is a lot more execution expertise, making sure plans get implemented."

Major developing markets are also being targeted as Results tries to stay ahead of the curve.

It has already opened an office in China, where Mr Ridler said many of the business owners are English-speaking foreigners hungry for feedback on improving their businesses.

India offers similar potential but the business environment "is still a little bit wild over there," and he says there are no concrete plans for Results expanding into the subcontinent as of yet.

But what is business coaching, and why do businesses need it?

According to Mr Ridler, business coaching is no different to sports coaching; the purpose is to help athletes, or in this case, businesses, achieve better (you guessed it) results.

Just as in sport, businesses are analysed for strengths and weaknesses, and coaches with particular areas of focus are assigned to target the worst performing aspects

FIVE STEPS TO HAVING A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS

Business coaching company Results Group, ninth on this year's Deloitte Fast 50 index of the fastest growing companies in New Zealand, is living up to its name.

This would certainly lend its coaches some credibility when advising other business owners how to get it done.

Managing director Ben Ridler said the recession is actually helping Results, as more business owners sought coaching to improve their companies' performance and try to survive the downturn.

You have to pay good money for Results' coaching sessions but Mr Ridler has some general advice for owners and managers of struggling companies. He says there are five key steps to having a successful business:

1. Know the risks
2. Have a plan
3. Execution
4. Execution
5. Execution

"The essential elements of running a successful business don't change in good times or bad," he says.

"Business is bloody hard- the companies that are doing badly are just getting an education."

And psychology may be as important as finances in determining which companies make it out of the slump and which ones don't, according to Mr Ridler.

"You need to be the optimist, be positive," he said.

"There are only two professions where pessimists do better, and these are lawyers and psychiatrists. What you focus on grows."

of each company.

As well as intensive planning and strategy sessions (sometimes lasting up to two days), clients are given sheets that help them set out 90-day plans and BHAGs (big hairy audacious goals).

To keep things fresh, companies are given a different coach every 90 days.

For some it may seem strange that the top business owners and executives in the country need coaching to improve performance but Mr Ridler explained why using a Tiger Woods analogy.

"Someone once asked Tiger Woods, 'you're the best golfer in the world, why do you need a coach?' and he replied, 'because I can't see my own swing.'

"No matter how good you are, it's always useful to have a fresh, impartial perspective."

And that's no different for the coaches themselves, with constant perform-

ance reviews and competition between practices and individual coaches keeping standards consistently high.

The ownership structure helps, said Mr Ridler, as the practices each had shares in the company, meaning, "everyone is going in the same direction."

And he said that for many of the coaches, it was about much more than just money.

"Our coaches are all experienced business people; some come from the banking profession and are more finance-focused, while some have been in the corporate world and/or owned businesses.

"A lot don't need to work, so they have good balance in their lives; they're not money-driven people. Most of them have been doing it (helping other business) anyway; it's in our nature.

"Our guys are passionate about their clients' success."

DVD RENTALS

Engorged Fatso launches

Chris Keall

New Zealand's three DVD-by-mail services will begin their merged operations today as Fatso and Movieshack combine under a single Fatso website. DVD Unlimited will join two weeks later.

But while the new service, trading under the Fatso brand, will enjoy a monopoly on DVDs ordered via the web then delivered by mail, the jury is out on its commercial prospects.

"This is still a marginal business," said Sky TV chief executive John Fellet, adding that DVD Unlimited's standalone revenue was equivalent to that of two BlockBuster stores. We wanted to merge the three services to see if we could make a go of it."

Fatso boss Rob Berman, who will manage the merged service, said he was aiming to at least double its business over the next 18 months - which would take it to around 20,000 subscribers.

Sky TV director of marketing Mike Watson said Fatso has less than 1% market penetration. By contrast, US trailblazer Netflix has up to 10% penetration in some territories.

In a deal driven by Mr Fellet, the Sky TV-owned DVD Unlimited merged with the independent services Fatso and Movieshack in June. The trio created the independent, unlisted Screen Enterprises, 51% owned by Sky TV, and trading as Fatso.

DVD Unlimited brings the most cash, subscribers and inventory to new company. Movieshack supplies the back-end software, and Fatso the management with its boss, Rob Berman, becoming general manager of the combined operation.

ckeall@nbr.co.nz

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nkloeten@nbr.co.nz



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