

Starting strong in Greater Dandenong

Uncle's Smallgoods

FROM SMALL GOODS TO BIG BUSINESS

Bert Glinka and Brendan D'Amelio studied communications and marketing at university where they met, found steady jobs in their fields, but also found themselves completely unsatisfied with their careers.

Food truck festivals

Bert took his passion for tasty east-European smallgoods and turned it into a weekend business with Brendan – now his brother-in-law – selling kranskys from Uncle's Smallgoods. With his Polish background, Bert frequented the retailer as a child; the husband and wife-run business had been an institution in Dandenong for more than 20 years.

Bert and Brendan's 'Yumski' food truck first appeared at Federation Square.

"We had no experience but sold more than 2,000 sausages and made a good profit," says Bert. "Future events weren't as successful – if it wasn't for the first, we might not have had that taste of business success to give us confidence."

Purchasing Uncle's Smallgoods

When *Uncle's Smallgoods* went on the market and the duo expressed interest, owner

Marian Poprawski presented them with a giant wood pile and two axes so they could prove their commitment to the wood-smoked delicacies the business was known for. "Marian's lesson was that you should understand every job – no matter how basic – within a business," Bert said.

The pair eventually took over Uncle's in September 2013 with a six-month transition period. "Our priority was to seamlessly take over *Uncle's Smallgoods* and then customers started calling us 'young uncles'.

"We created a sausage bouquet for Valentine's Day 2017. Herald Sun picked it up and it took a life of its own; we had to shut down online sales as we couldn't keep up with demand."
Bert Glinka, Owner & Marketing Manager Uncle's Smallgoods



Expansion and diversification

Due to demand, Bert and Brendan started the wholesale arm of the business and then in March 2014 replaced the storeroom next door with a café called 'Young Uncles'.

"Our intention was always to boost Uncle's Smallgoods, which was an institution but isolating for non-Polish people, so the café played a big role in making it more inviting."

Business grant boost

In mid-2014, Young Uncles received a Small Business Grant from the City of Greater Dandenong. This was used to add outdoor seating and purchase a superior coffee machine – the latter tripling sales.

The Age's Epicure and Herald Sun's Taste have featured the businesses with a Valentine's Day initiative going viral, receiving exposure on Kiis FM and Channel 9.

Uncle's Smallgoods launched online sales in December 2016 and continues to participate in activities such as "talk and taste" sessions for Good Food Month, which Bert recommends as a great way to win new customers.

Next phase for wholesale and café businesses

"We've always had a business plan that we regularly review," says Bert. "On 9 September last year at our three-year mark, we were able to tick off everything except relocating the manufacturing to a factory.

"It was uncanny but I looked online, found a potential site, and we bought it that same day. The address is 9 Dunn Crescent, bought on the 9th of the 9th!"

www.unclessmallgoods.com

Uncle's Smokehouse & Deli

123 Thomas St, Dandenong

Young Uncles

127 Thomas St, Dandenong

Sunny & Thor

225 Lonsdale St,
Dandenong

Factory

9 Dunn Crescent,
Dandenong

Uncle's Smallgoods is currently looking to invest up to \$300,000 in new equipment to take its wholesale production to "the next level" and is investigating grants to assist with this, with hopes the factory will be running by Christmas 2017.

The business supplies to delis, hotels and the hospitality industry in Victoria and South Australia and is looking to expand into the rest of Australia.

With Young Uncle's being take-away focussed, Bert and Brendan opened their 'Sunny and Thor' cafe in May 2017 in the new Greater Dandenong Council building to cater for business events and customers wanting to dine-in.

Since 2013, Bert and Brendan have grown their business from six employees to around 15 and hope to have 20 staff when their new factory is operational.

Start-up lessons from Uncle's Smallgoods Challenges

- ✗ Having a key staff member leave during one of the business' busiest periods
- ✗ Automating production for handcrafted products where the original 'recipes' were guided by touch, sight and smell

Achievements

- » Receiving a City of Greater Dandenong Small Business Grant and nomination for the Greater Dandenong Chamber of Commerce Business Awards
- » Media exposure, especially around the Valentine's Day sausage bouquet promotion
- » Hearing a Polish customer say, "Christmas wouldn't be the same without Uncle's."

Top three start-up tips

1. Before you even spend a dollar, complete a 12-month cash-flow plan; what you think you'll earn versus your exact expenses and the break-even point.
2. Know your trade and how to do every single role in your business so if your workforce leaves, your business doesn't fall down.
3. Source the right equipment to do the job and spend that extra money; your machine being down for the day can end up costing you much more.

