

"HOW WILL WE MAKE IT HAPPEN?"

AN ORGANISATION HAS ESTABLISHED WHERE IT IS NOW AND WHERE IT WANTS TO BE. NOW IS THE TIME TO START WORK. ATTACHED TO EACH AGREED GOAL WILL BE A STRATEGY FOR HOW IT IS TO BE ACHIEVED. THIS STRATEGY IS TRANSLATED INTO AN ACTION PLAN, WHICH SETS A TIME FRAME AND A PROCESS FOR EVALUATING RESULTS.

going the distance

- getting there!

Miles ahead looked at how various organisations have set about communicating their vision and mission and achieving their goals.

"ARTS MARKETING IS ABOUT LOVING PEOPLE. YOU HAVE THIS SENSE THAT YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING THAT MATTERS AND YOU WANT THEM TO HAVE IT TOO. REAL EVANGELISTS GET A LOT BACK FROM DEALING DIRECTLY WITH CUSTOMERS"

Creative Arts Marketing



keeping the vision alive in the marketplace

"Creating little animals for tourists does not degenerate Aboriginal culture. It is a reflection by an Aboriginal artist of their own country, of belonging to it. Not everyone can afford to buy something larger," points out Stephen Fox, director of Maruku Arts and Crafts.

From the days when people from Amata in the central desert sold their wood carvings (puṇu) at the base of Uluru, the seeds of an idea were sown. Peter Yates and Pat D'Arango, together with such artists as Walter Pukutiwara, Topsy Tjulyata, Pulya Taylor and others, developed a strong marketing company for Aboriginal artists and craftspeople living in the area. Impressive results to date include sales approaching the million dollar mark in 1998 from wholesale and retail activities.

Before taking up the position of director of Maruku, Steve Fox was an arts coordinator of Buku-Larrnygay at Yirrkala (north-east Arnhemland), then director of 24 HR Art, where he did some pretty innovative things with Aboriginal prison inmates, but that's another story.

Steve believes that Maruku's success is the combination of a history of creating art and the ground rules that were set down originally for the company. It has always been clear that Maruku exists to market the wood people are carving. It has always had an Aboriginal executive to review progress. It is well-positioned, with a retail outlet in a major tourist destination that has a strong focus on sales. It has not over-diversified, and has maintained a strong position in the marketplace for Aboriginal wood carvings.

Situated ideally for promotion by the local resort, Maruku has established a good relationship with the corporate owners and has a full page story, which costs them nothing to produce, in their quarterly holiday booklet for visitors. Maruku also has been the source of gifts for the resort owners' clients; and when the resort was sold to another company, large goanna carvings, costing several hundred dollars each, were purchased for their retiring board members.

Organisational background

Maruku Arts and Crafts is a craft company, owned and controlled by Anangu (Aboriginal people from the south-east and west of Central Australia). Its warehouse is based within the Mutitjulu Community and its retail outlet is at Uluru - Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre, at the base of Uluru. Maruku is the trading arm of the Anangu Uwankaraku Puṇu Aboriginal Corporation set up in 1984, and literally means 'wood belonging to Anangu'. Maruku assists craftspeople throughout the Anangu (collective name of Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara and

DESTINATION: Mutitjulu NT

COMPANY: Maruku Arts And Craft



Steve points out that innovation for an Aboriginal artist in their country might be to curve the tail of one of their animals around and lay it back over the top. Following the work of artists over the year, individuals like Steve can see the changes, and he promotes this in the marketplace.

Bowls with important stories have been purchased by Maruku for up to \$1,000. However, Steve is aware that he needs to explain to artists and craftspeople that not every carved bowl can command that price.

"We have come a long way from the days when we had a handful of outlets. We maintain loyalty to our longstanding clients who themselves have a history of dealing with the artists and developing a market for their work, and we work with them on exhibitions and major projects. The growth rate of artists producing is now far greater than the potential provided by a few outlets. We need a lot of markets, not just the Aboriginal art market or the tourist market."

Running an operation in an international tourist venue requires being open seven days a week. This requires careful planning with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff to allow Aboriginals time to attend to cultural business. Maruku employs 6 full-time staff, 6 part-time. For some Aboriginal staff, working with Maruku has been beneficial in gaining enterprise development experience. There is a core group of 40 Aboriginal artists from the community who work at the Cultural Centre at different times.

Maruku has its own gallery-type space at the Cultural Centre, but has started to move some of the higher-priced items into the retail area, after noticing that tourists from Europe - especially Italy, Germany and America - don't look at the price before deciding to purchase, and will buy shields for \$350 or goannas for \$600.

Having a healthy cash flow from sales of smaller items, Maruku can now confidently focus on developing the higher end of the market and promote the work through exhibitions.

Ngaanyatjara speaking people) lands by coordinating the marketing and promotion of their work and providing them with essential support services and advice.

Eighteen communities, spread over an area similar in size to Victoria, now jointly own Maruku Arts and Crafts. There are approximately 800 craftspeople who contribute work on a regular basis, and the artists' cooperative is thought to be the largest of its kind in Australia.

The Maruku bush truck visits each community on a regular basis. Craftspeople are paid cash for their work and can buy tools from the truck. The visits also give Maruku staff the opportunity to talk to the craftspeople about Maruku operations and share ideas.

When Steve goes bush to buy, people are waiting and often have overflowing boxes. Going through each and every wood carving, he sometimes finds the most elaborate designs even on the smallest carving sold for around five dollars. Genuine praise is given and a return visit sees the same or better quality.

"Some people ask me if we buy everything. If it is good quality, we buy it. That's what it is about. Every time we go into a community, we talk to people and discuss what we would like to see made or need for our marketing - from sales to tourists outlets and gift shops to major exhibitions in galleries and museums."

"When you are buying people's work and someone has made something really quite wonderful, I praise them. You can excite people then to go on and even stretch the boundaries of what they are doing. I take quite a bit of time when we are buying, even down to the tiniest little thing."

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Exhibitions

Exhibitions are an important part of the marketing mix for Maruku. They develop the company image, new markets, have impact and results are measurable.

"What new products are you releasing?" is a commonly-asked question at the International Gift Trade Fair at Darling Harbour, where Maruku has been exhibiting for several years. This trade-only exhibition attracts over 15,000 buyers from throughout Australia and overseas to its five day fair. Gift shop owners, newsagents, art and craft gallery owners, corporate buyers and catalogue companies are just a few of the many who attend. And not everyone who attends is looking for Aboriginal craft - but they may find the product appealing once they have seen Maruku's display.

Steve explains to buyers that Maruku was created to keep certain traditions alive, and that the new contemporary carvings of lizards, snakes, birds and bowls are contemporary art within an Aboriginal world. He goes into details of individual efforts to find roots and curves that give the carvings more animation.

"We are able to meet our clients face to face. They get to know who you are, and when you sit down and have product around you, you can explain more, and generate interest in a wider range."

"Do you take minimum orders?" "Our minimum order is that you buy something. Even with small orders of \$150, that's money in the pocket. It is our business to sell. By starting with small orders, buyers can test the product in their outlets. If the product works for them, then they reorder every month or so."

Staff send out letters prior to the fair to Maruku buyers throughout Australia, offering a 10% discount on any order placed at the show. Buyers often do not place orders at a fair, preferring to think about what they have seen and their budget. However, Steve found a number of buyers unable to resist the offer.

Participation in the trade fair is time-consuming and tiring. Maruku artists often travel to exhibition openings, but the trade fair is handled by staff, including Steve and his partner, Lillian Fox, Wholesale Manager.



Steve looks for a variety of exhibiting opportunities, not just at Aboriginal art galleries. He has found the Australian Girls' Own Gallery (aGOG) in Canberra an excellent exhibition venue for some of the Aboriginal women artists with whom he has worked over the years, and it is also providing an opportunity for the National Gallery of Australia's Aboriginal curator to see their work.

Since his arrival at Maruku, Steve has been addressing the issue of promoting individual artists more and not just the brand name of Maruku. Exhibition catalogues always contain details of where the individual pieces come from, identifying artists with the country.

"The artists are getting more innovative, more elaborate and more adventurous in how they tell the story of their country. When buying the work of an artist like Billy Warra - "who is a really old fella and one of the bosses for ngintaka (goanna) dreaming - you are buying history and the importance of the story. You have to pay for this. It is insulting to a person if you pay them cheaply for a part of their life, land and religion".

In 1998, Maruku will participate again in SOFA (Sculpture, Objects, Functional Art) in Chicago as part of Craft Australia's presentation of galleries in this important craft marketing event in the United States. Taking part in the Nagoya World Dynamic Business Fair in Japan in early 1998 also has opened up new avenues of sales. A prefecture in Japan has bought some of Maruku's display and is putting it into an Australian garden they have established.



Exhibitions provide opportunities to inform the marketplace of what your product will do for buyers and how it will do it better than any other product, and to increase sales immediately or in the longer term.

Trade fairs as an ingredient in the marketing mix

Trade fairs are industry events that bring together buyers and sellers, and offer the opportunity to expose a variety of products to interested parties in a very short space of time.

Advantages of trade fair participation:

- Buyers are actively seeking products
- Visitors come from all over Australia and overseas
- Contacts are made with existing and potential customers
- A full range of products can be displayed and demonstrated
- Communication is cost-effective and direct, leading to sales
- Markets can be researched, and competitive products compared

The wide variety of visitors to gift trade fairs can include not only buyers from gift shops and galleries, but also interior decorators, department store and corporate buyers, hotel and restaurant designers, property developers, mail order catalogue publishers, chemists, nurseries and many more. This offers exhibitors the opportunity to research the many facets of a product range, including price, packaging, size, colour, practicality and general appeal.

In the past few years, there has been a marked increase in the quantity and quality of Australian-made goods exhibited, for example, at the Reed Exhibitions gift trade fairs at Sydney's Darling Harbour in February and September.

First-time participation in a trade fair can be a daunting prospect, but many Australian craftspeople and designer-makers have started their exhibiting careers, and their businesses, by joining an established group stand, such as that run successfully for several years by the Sydney-based consultancy Craft Contact Australia. All administration, stand design and construction, display modules and promotion are provided, as well as preparatory advice and sales training. Participants learn a great deal from the buyers, other group members and exhibitors. The experience thus gained gives group participants the confidence required to develop into seasoned exhibitors in their own right.

Participants from the regions, who may suffer the tyranny of distance, have been able to meet potential buyers, research their products or get into mainstream marketing as a result of exhibiting at trade fairs. Acknowledgment of their innovative talent has also been achieved, as in the case of 'The Poppy Bin' of Warialda in northern New South Wales: their handpainted dried poppy arrangements won their section in the Australian Gift of the Year Award.