

The road to prosperity

PRIESTLEY'S GOURMET DELIGHTS PRODUCES FROZEN CHEESECAKES, GATEAUX, TARTS AND SLICES FOLLOWING STRICT ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES – IT PAYS OFF



Photos: Capture Photographic & Imaging

+ Neil Jensen, CEO of Priestley's Gourmet Delights, knows what he wants. Since he took over the management of the company from Morningside, Queensland, many things have changed. The growth rates, however, have remained the same. The turnover has doubled every 2.5 years. Founders Marilyn & Peter Jones and Tony and Judith Christophersen still own the company but are not involved in the daily business any more. They used to mainly manufacture fresh artisan gateaux and cakes which a driver delivered to their customers. When the number of trucks reached 22, and their working days totaled 14 hours per day, 7 days of the week, they employed Jensen. He now organizes the company. Today, there is no more direct delivery to customers. The products are exclusively frozen goods, sold via wholesalers or exported: tarts, gateaux, individual desserts, muffins and tray cakes. Neil Jensen knows that he is heading a medium-sized company, despite the fast-paced growth. Therefore, he invests a lot of time into two factors, which in his opinion, are the road to success and cannot be easily copied by large competitors. Deliberately, the image was that of premium quality due to the use of high quality raw materials. The customers can read in each catalogue the quality of suppliers allowed to supply Priestley's. Amongst the names, which are well known to each consumer, are, for example, Cadbury and Sunny Queen eggs. 98.9% of the products are sold to food service companies in Australia, including coffee shop chains such as Gloria Jeans, Coffee Club and McCafé as well as to hotels and catering services. They also export products into Russia, Singapore and Hong Kong.

Within the next two years, this proportion is expected to change. 50% of the products will be delivered to the food service industry, 25% for export while the remaining 25% will be distributed to the food retail trade. Together with a



supermarket chain in Australia, Jensen is working on supplying products to retail outlets. Further plans for export include Indonesia, the US-American West Coast, the Gulf States and Great-Britain. Jensen is currently testing in New Zealand as to how to put this plan into practice. Shortly after he had assumed his new job at Priestley's, he acquired Melba Foods, a New Zealand based dessert manufacturer. His reasoning: he wanted to be present in the Kiwi Café scene.

Also of major importance is his human resources policy. By way of head hunters, he has recruited a selected management team which not only brings in much experience from the food industry – something not necessarily taken for granted in Australia's rather tight job market – but which also goes along with his philosophy. "Medium-sized companies can only be successful if they have qualified and committed personnel. Working for Priestley's should be fun." This means: paying good wages, creating a pleasant working environment, offering computer games, such as Wiis and similar for relaxing. Jensen: "This not only reduces absenteeism from work but also increases productivity. Each personnel change in the work place costs us about 15,000 dollars. This money can be invested better."

The products offered by Priestley's are ready to use after thawing. These include 14 different types of cheesecake as well as tray cakes, muffins and individually wrapped cookies. All products can be stored for max. 3-5 days at 0-3 °C.

According to Jensen, the trend in Australia and Asia is going towards small single wrapped portions. This product range has grown in the three-digit range. Another trend is towards products considered to be healthy and ones that can be labeled as gluten free. +++