

INESS

Michael cleans up money from muck

Michael Boocock was just 22 when he shifted to Nelson, took out a \$50,000 loan, bought a rubbish truck and started a garbage collection company.

Within two years he had the loan paid off. Now, 12 years later, he employs seven staff and has five trucks on weekly runs that extend as far out as Atawhai, Wakefield and Motueka.

Boocock's father started a similar business in Wellington in the 1970s before selling out to a multi-national company 15 years ago. Boocock adopted the same name as his father's business and searched the country looking for the right place to replicate his success.

It came down to Tauranga, Dunedin or Nelson. Which was the most appealing place to live and the best fit?

He says the wheelie-bin service was a new concept for many people. He went door knocking and began a weekly stall at Nelson's Saturday market to drum up business. "That worked really well for me. I've still got a lot of customers that came from there."

Boocock acknowledges his father's advice was also "a huge help". "I was pretty young and I needed a lot of guidance."

He didn't expect business to take off as quickly as it did. "I was very surprised competitors didn't take me too seriously, luckily enough."

Boocock originally based the operation from his home but now operates from premises in an industrial part of Stoke. He lives in an apartment there with his partner, Charmaine Boyd, who works elsewhere as a project manager but provides a "good sounding board" for his business ideas.

Boocock puts a lot of effort into his marketing, which includes a regular newsletter to customers. "We're trying to get back to a more human face."

That's one way of differentiating himself from multinational competition. The two biggest players in



Down to Business

Karen Goodger

New Zealand, Envirowaste and Waste Management, had been sold to Australia in recent years but continue to dominate the commercial market, he says.

"We're nibbling away and can basically do the [commercial] services they can do."

Boocock believes his company services about a quarter of all residential customers in the areas he operates. Can Plan has never gone backwards with sales, although it's taken "a lot of hard work" and there's been plenty of challenges along the way. Tip fee increases have eaten into profit margins, making some years "very, very difficult", he says.

"Tip fees are probably one of my biggest concerns. Nelson's haven't gone crazy like some other cities. I have to give credit to them."

Tip fees were due to increase "hugely" again this March due to the introduction of Green Party policy, he says. "It makes us rubbish collectors feel like tax collectors."

Boocock isn't against recycling programmes. In fact they can result in more business, he says. Boocock is keen to start a cardboard recycling scheme but hasn't been able to make the numbers stack up. The only way to successfully enter recycling is through tendering for contracts, he says.

"I've gone for contracts in the past and I will go for them in future."

Boocock believes New Zealand's rubbish collection market is so sewn up that it would be "virtually impossible" to start up new now. He expects to see the industry "starting to flatten" but believes there will always be a place for Can Plan's services and isn't looking to sell.



Can do attitude: Can Plan owner Michael Boocock has no wish to sell his business.

Mail photo: COLIN SMITH 206973