

A Curtin Ignition Case Study

Hard Hat Bookkeeper Donna Vincent

“...I’m helping sole traders move towards the tax office directive of a paperless record-keeping system by the year 2020.”

Donna’s customers include hairdressers, engineers, lawyers, sub-contractors and women with home-based businesses. Anyone direct-selling products like Arbonne, Herbalife or Enjo find the product of real benefit. Donna says it has helped one lady running a small business prove to her husband that she really was contributing to the family budget. Donna says, “Hard Hat Bookkeeper doesn’t do wages, so it’s ideal for the sole trader and avoids the complexity of spreadsheets and traditional accounting software. There’s no need to do double entry bookkeeping. Invoices can be photographed or input as a PDF so it’s ideal for commission-based businesses, and those that do not generate a huge number of invoices over the course of the year. I’m currently targeting Uber drivers and direct-selling marketers, but it can be used by anyone and is so simple that some customers have said it’s so easy, it’s more like a game!” Users are even able to enter records via a mobile app, for greater flexibility and convenience.

Coming to Ignition with product already developed, Donna knew that her focus needed to be on sales and marketing but didn’t realise how much focus would be needed on these aspects of her business to make it successful.

Donna is the first to admit she is not young anymore, but she has found her age to be an advantage. “My age means that I’m not afraid to approach people. Some younger people have a fear of approaching ‘suits’, but this is where I find my age has an advantage. I also have learned over the years that finding the ‘gatekeeper’ is most important – finding that someone who knows someone who may be able to help you go forward, and I’m no longer afraid to ask for contacts. Ignition made approaching the professional people less ‘scary’ and helped me know what to ask for when I met them. The contacts I made during Ignition were invaluable. I’ve also learned that building a trust relationship is most important. Ignition, for me, created an awareness of what needed to be done and the mountains I have to climb. I may only be part way up but my passion to drive Hard Hat Bookkeeper will carry me through to success.”



For more information:

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This initiative is based on the successful Ignite program managed and delivered by the University of Cambridge Judge Business School’s Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (CfEL)

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Hard Hat Bookkeeper
Donna Vincent



Hard Hat Bookkeeper

“Three learnings from Ignition stuck firmly in my mind: if you estimate a task will take you one month, it will really take you two; everything will cost you double the amount of money you estimate; and spend every penny like it is your last. Having just extended the mortgage on my house to fund my business, this was really good information. Ignition tells you the realities and how it is.” Donna Vincent



Donna Vincent attended the 2014 Ignition. She was awarded a scholarship by the WA Small Business Development Corporation, and was surprised to find a program like Ignition! Coming from ‘old school’ thinking – that entrepreneurial education did not exist – she was not seeking to do a teaching program, and, in fact, did not know that entrepreneurial education was available.

As a woman with true fighting spirit, Donna did not take the easy route.

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Already bearing the burden of a family trauma, she decided to compound the pressure by starting her own business. She came to Ignition with her product, Hard Hat Bookkeeper, a ‘one-stop’, easy-to-use bookkeeping package aimed at sole traders and contractors. The product was ready for market, but Donna had already discovered how hard it was to make that product a success.

Ignition proved to be a big learning curve – Donna openly admits that she didn’t realise a business plan might be needed to help drive her business forward. She says, “It was so intensive and full-on that I cried every day, but delighted in the fact that the people who I met through the program were ‘real’ people, who have real experience of bringing new products and services to market, and knew exactly where I was in my journey. Three learnings from Ignition stuck firmly in my mind: if you estimate a task will take you one month, it will really take you two; everything will cost you double the amount of money you estimate; and spend every penny like it is your last. Having just extended the mortgage on my house to fund my business, this was really good information. Ignition tells you the realities and how it is. If I had done the program before starting my business,

I may well have not started! But I’m passionate about what I do and I feel certain the passion – or foolishness – would have carried me through. Anyone thinking of doing a start-up – and considering quitting their day job – needs to do Ignition first as a ‘check and balance’, it may save a lot of heartache!”

Hard Hat Bookkeeper is aimed at sole traders and small business people. It’s especially useful for people who have a fear of or inexperience in bookkeeping and record keeping. As Donna says: “If you don’t like spreadsheets or you use ‘shoe box accounting’, then Hard Hat Bookkeeper is the product that will help you organise all the records you need for your quarterly BAS without having to think about it, and will prepare reports for your end of tax year very simply and easily. It also makes all your records ‘mobile’, as you can store and access your information using your mobile devices. Documents such as your licenses, insurances, orders and superannuation records; in fact, anything you may need for your day-to-day business or end of year is available. So I’m helping sole traders move towards the tax office directive of a paperless record-keeping system by the year 2020. For many people, the thought of bookkeeping instills a

AT A GLANCE

Business name:
Hard Hat Bookkeeper

Web address:
www.hardhatbookkeeper.com.au

Number of employees: **1**

Founder: **Donna Vincent**

Date incorporated: **April 2013**

Commercialisation: **2015**
Innovation Vouchers Program
2015 Round 2, November 2015

Ignition year: **2014**

sense of fear, but it’s been well proven by my clients that Hard Hat Bookkeeper dramatically reduces the time spent in BAS reporting. In fact, one female client said it reduced the time taken to do her BAS from three days to two hours and stopped her need to yell at her children when they walked all over her accounting papers that she had scattered all over the floor!”

With her product currently priced at only \$180 (plus GST) per annum, Donna is now moving her business into its second year and clients are renewing their subscriptions. Donna suggests Hard Hat Bookkeeper as a much simpler alternative to products such as Xero and MYOB. It is specifically designed for sole traders and consultants and, as such, has a massive market opportunity. The difficulty is in finding a niche within such a wide market.

