



# Small Business Victoria

## workshops and seminars

City of Yarra

### Alex Grant Violins **Adding another string to their bow**



#### Challenges I faced

Marina nominates starting a business in a new city as the couple's first challenge.

*"No-one knew us when we arrived in Melbourne but we have gained people's trust by providing a very high ethical and service standard."*

Marketing and finding new customers remain challenging, but Marina is planning new approaches.

*"I know there are new customers out there. The course work has helped to identify particular groups and market more effectively to them."*

A Melbourne business planned for growth with help from the Victorian Government's Small Business Victoria workshops.

#### How I started

A passion for music and the desire to control their professional lives prompted Marina and Alex Grant to establish Alex W Grant Violins in Collingwood over a decade ago.

*"Alex has always been interested in musical instruments," said New Zealand-born Marina. "He's from the highlands of Scotland and music's in the blood there."*

Alex is formally trained and worked for violin houses in the United Kingdom and Hong Kong for many years before the couple were drawn to start their own business.

They had visited Melbourne years ago and decided it was a great place to make a fresh start. In 1996, they opened the doors of their first business, with Alex handling the violins and Marina taking on the administrative side of things.

#### Assistance I sought

A decade on, Marina and Alex's store was doing well so they decided to open a second shop. It was a good time to refresh and expand their business skills and knowledge through a *Small Business Victoria* workshop with the City of Yarra.

A staff member completed an *Understanding Financial Statements* workshop. Marina and Alex undertook the *Groom Your Business for Profitable Growth* workshop.

Marina says both workshops proved worthwhile at an important stage of their business.

*"The presenters were very skilled and just attending the workshops inspired us. Sometimes you wonder if it's worth spending the time and money on training courses but we're glad we did."*

*"I enjoyed listening to the experiences of other business owners, and relating what they said to our business was really helpful. You can become very insular and isolated – it was good to learn that we were not alone in our experiences."*

#### What I learned

The workshops have prompted positive changes in the business which Marina says have been important to its recent growth.

*"We have reconsidered our pricing, developed an effective office manual and looked at getting the most from our accounting software, amongst other things."*

*"The most powerful thing we've done, however, is write a formal business plan. We've always had one in our heads but the workshop prompted us to put our vision on paper and plotting how to get there has been a valuable exercise."*

#### My business today

In 2007, Marina and Alex opened their second store in Hawthorn. They employ eight staff and are busy selling and repairing violins as well as providing insurance valuations.

Marina says enjoyment comes from the people they meet in the business as much as the instruments they work with.

*"We get to know parents, kids and even their grandparents. There aren't too many businesses that provide that spread of generational contact."*

#### Where to from here

Consolidating the business is the priority for the future. While it has traditionally serviced classical players Marina foresees potential in other genres such as jazz and folk.

*"We want to be successful but two shops are more than enough right now, although the course work may inspire us further as time goes on!"*