

## TALVOR

- Established: 2005 by Apollo Motorhome Holidays
- Executive Team: Business Manager Paul Truman; CEO Luke Trouchet
- Staff: 50
- Annual turnover: \$25 million
- Business: RV manufacture

diplomacy and consideration; as Truman explains, Talvor has a flat structure with essentially only two levels of staff — management and factory.

“We didn’t want to create false hopes and prep people for something that wasn’t going to happen because we’d just waste money and lose them anyway,” he says.

“We selected a training program which was geared around the guys learning skills that would be of value to them and of interest to them.”

Talvor’s course was structured around a competitive manufacturing program that had been trialled in southern states in early

times recently, with 10 percent year on year growth for the past decade.

However, the market, like many others, is now starting to show signs of slowing down.

Truman believes that Queensland is somewhat insulated from economic pressures.

However, he admits that pressures such as fuel prices and global currency rates will have an impact on the industry.

In particular, he expects that one of Talvor’s major customer groups — retirees — will be looking to cut costs and tighten the reins on their disposable spending in the near future.

While these issues will certainly affect Talvor, Truman is confident that the industry slow down is part of a natural balancing trend rather than a downturn in the market.

### SELF-PROMOTION

With staffing, quality control and business growth at the forefront of Talvor’s success, branding and self-promotion have not been major focuses for the company.

Truman has recently committed a “significant level” (more than five times any previous amount) of budget dollars into promoting the Talvor brand.

## “LAST YEAR WE BUILT MORE MOTORHOMES IN THE CLASS OF VEHICLE THAT WE MANUFACTURE THAN ANYONE ELSE IN THE COUNTRY..”

2006 and was federally approved as a Certificate IV course.

Eight workers went through the first round of the program after completing an application process to assess their dedication.

“We made sure we were picking the right people, not just people who were looking for a couple of hours off the tools,” Truman explains.

He says the first round was “very successful” and Talvor has just commenced its second wave of internal training.

### MARKET ACTIVITY

“Apollo will always be, by and large, our main customer — some would call that vertical integration,” Truman says.

Second tier rental companies around Australia are also buying the motorhomes.

On top of staff development and business growth, Truman’s pet project has been to improve the quality of Talvor’s products.

“It would have been easy to just focus on the growth and keep doing it how we’d done it, but I couldn’t do it — if we were going to make product we had to make good product,” he says.

Capitalising on Apollo’s rental knowledge, Truman placed a major focus on longevity and quality of finishings in both the rental and retail models.

The RV industry has seen prosperous

“It takes a while to build a new brand.

We’ve only been at it for a little over three years and we’re starting to get to a point where people are starting to recognise the brand so we need to drive that home harder,” Truman says.

“Last year we built more motorhomes in the class of vehicle that we manufacture than anyone else in the country by a significant amount and most people don’t even know we exist.

“In a lot of ways it has been a good thing to fly under the radar for a while but now it’s time to get ourselves out there and really push our brand.”

In addition to securing a greater share of the Australian market, Truman is also looking at international opportunities for the Talvor brand.

The company has dabbled in exports to Germany and New Zealand, and Truman says he sees plenty more opportunity in those markets.

And he is in no way daunted by being the so-called ‘new kid on the block’.

“We’re part of the Apollo group of companies which has been around for over 20 years as a Queensland-based privately owned company. So despite the fact that the manufacturing arm has only been around for a short amount of time, the business has a lot of experience within the industry.” ■

# This business is personal

**I am continually amazed at how dumb I was last month.**

**While in Melbourne consulting to an accounting firm on how to improve their pricing and marketing strategies, they asked me to recommend a keynote speaker for their annual conference.**  
“Me!”

**“Oh, come on Ric, you’re a business consultant. Really, you must know some good speakers. Who should we call?”**

**I speak at about 40 major conferences around the world each year, but they didn’t know this.**

**Why does this happen when we know it costs more to attract a new client than to keep an existing one?**

**All of us at some point take our clients for granted or, worse still, fail to identify the opportunities to increase revenues from satisfied customers.**

**Many of my clients in law, accounting, financial advisory and so on have implemented specific client retention strategies, while others have just a defined philosophy about customers, such as: “new business is wonderful, but our business is built on our existing clients”**

**Yet some organisations haven’t grasped the dynamic of customer service.**

**Consider a divorce proceeding. The wife states, “your Honour, my husband never tells me he loves me”**

**The husband retorts, “your Honour I told her I loved her when we married. It holds good until I revoke it!”**

**Today’s marketplace is highly competitive in ways it has never been before.**

**Personally ask your clients how many times they’ve been approached by your competitors and pursued aggressively.**

**Then ask yourself if you can continue to be sanguine about keeping your clients happy, on a day-by-day basis.**

**There are some things clearly necessary in client retention: being polite to clients; doing good work; being responsive; and being timely in delivering promised reports and material.**

**However, this is simply being professional. It’s what the client is paying for.**

**The larger picture of client retention is predicated upon recognising the competitive and changing nature of the marketplace.**

**Sophisticated professional services firms have a strong handle on who their client company is, what their needs are, and how to address those needs in marketing approaches.**

**If you don’t have that same knowledge, and total involvement in**

**your client’s concerns, you’re in danger of losing that client.**

**Client retention requires more than doing good work. It’s at least:**

- being immersed in a client’s business
- frequently being in contact beyond the engagement, with useful, valuable and worthwhile information.
- maintaining a relationship. Not just drinking and dining to keep the client happy, but establishing and reinforcing a sense of mutual understanding and trust, both personal and professional.
- visible quality control systems. If the client doesn’t know about your quality control systems they have no reason to believe they exist.

**More importantly, the quality control systems should relate to the client’s business, not yours.**

• regular client surveys. Former New York mayor Koch used to walk the streets asking people, “How am I doing?”

**Successful professionals are those who’ve learned the difference between ‘client relations’ and ‘client service’. Both are important, neither substitutes the other, you must have both.**

**It’s the peculiar nature of professional services that quality plays little or no role in getting new business, yet when defined as giving the client what they need, want and expect it’s crucial in client retention.**

**To know what the client needs, wants, and expects you have to be immersed in the relationship and you have to ask. Here, quality is not an abstraction — it’s a reality.**

**Those who are most successful at client retention actively work at it**

**They know why it’s true that keeping a client is still cheaper than getting a new one.**

*Readers of Queensland Business Review can download the “What’s Wrong in Selling Professional Services in Australia?” research paper free from the Executive Wisdom website.*

### RIC WILLMOT

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