

# on the sharks

Alan and Janine developed Stance footwear initially, but Swimming With Sharks came about from the reality of their business experience,

"Being shafted by all these other people, you're always out there swimming with sharks, so that's where the brand name came from," said Alan.

"We sat down and did a rough scribble of our trademark, and we trademarked it worldwide before we even designed a shoe. We introduced Swimming With Sharks about four years ago, and it's been pretty much a hit straight away – we've built up instant brand recognition," he said.

Besides that, Stance Footwear is unique in the shoe industry as it's the only shoe company that actually designs and markets their product under their own label.

"There's a few people that copy other people's designs, whereas we start from our own designs in our Sharks range. We have them manufactured in China, we have an office there with three staff, and like everything, you have to work hard at it," said Alan.

"We spend three months in China, or more than a hundred days a year. Our main employee there is a Chinese national, she's fluent in English," he said.

I asked whether this meant he was now fluent in Chinese?

"I can say hello and goodbye, and 'how much does this cost?,' he laughed.

Their leather shoes are sold all around Australia and New Zealand, and if you combine the ranges from the Hopscotch, Stance and Swimming With Sharks labels,

there's not an area that they haven't covered.

"We sell our Swimming With Sharks product to Taiwan and have people who distribute it in Switzerland and Germany. We sell on the web, a lot of people come from overseas, and want another pair after they get home, so we're actually looking at finding a distributor in the UK," he said.

I asked Alan if the ultimate aim was to build a global company.

"Yes and no, there are things that we have to look at, we're just going to continue to design the shoes the way we design them anyway.

"We've got a fairly broad collection, albeit in Europe we'll be skewed towards Summer rather than Winter because that's what our climate is here, but that's what'll make our shoes unique. They're designed here, they reflect Australia in a lot of respects as far as colour goes, the main criteria for us is that they're comfortable," he said. I can vouch for that, as someone who hates the thought of wearing runners, my little Mary Janes have done some serious kilometres and are still going strong.

Their miraculously long life might be bad for business in the long run, but the good word-of-mouth must compensate,

"We put a lot of effort into how we put our shoes together. We have our own criteria, we have our own quality controllers that sit on the production line and watch every pair of shoes that come off, we have the infrastructure in place in China to secure our manufacturing," Alan said.

Alan and Janine moved to Maroochydore last year from Melbourne.

"This was going to be a seachange but the business has ramped up since then, so we haven't had the chance to do anything as far as a change of lifestyle goes," said Alan.

There is a plan though – Alan would like to have more time to ride his bike a bit more often.

By this time I have my suspicions, and ask Alan if he would call himself and Janine workaholics. The answer is a definitive 'yes'.

"It's not what we probably want to be, but it's what we are or who we are," he said.

Is it because of the rapid success of the business, or would they be like that anyway?

"We'd be like that anyway!" Alan laughed.

"We're both very determined, and we both have a very clear direction of what we want to do. The main thing is that the shoes are designed here in Australia, and Swimming With Sharks is an Australian company wholly owned by us."

I'll bet that's a nice feeling, though.

"You do pay for it, being a workaholic, but yes, it's a nice feeling," he said.

Who would have thought swimming with sharks would be a 'nice feeling', but it's all in a day's work for a Townsville-bred bloke.



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