

Sleep Makers

WITH THE STRESS OF CORPORATE LIFE KEEPING THEM AWAKE AT NIGHT, THE ONLY DREAMS SISTERS TARA AND DANIELLE SUTTON WERE HAVING WERE OF SETTING UP THEIR OWN BUSINESS. AND FROM THAT SEARCH FOR A SOLUTION TO SLEEPLESS NIGHTS CAME THE INSPIRATION FOR A NEW VENTURE.



Sisters Tara and Danielle Sutton decided to start their own business after realising women were twice as likely to suffer from insomnia.

Tara and Danielle combined their respective retail marketing and pharmaceutical careers to co-found Sleep Sanctuary, producing and selling a range of aromatherapy and sleepwear products promising to deliver a better night's sleep.

Tara said the idea struck when the sisters realised that many of the people, particularly the women, in their lives were also struggling to 'switch off' during the night. Research led them to the U.S. National Sleep Foundation which told them that women were twice as likely as men to suffer from insomnia.

"I would wake up at 2 am on the dot, every morning, and couldn't switch my mind off to get back to sleep," Tara said.

"Talking to family and friends you realise you're not alone – and we could see that there was a demand for these types of products."

Following a trip to New York, the sisters were inspired that their idea that 'sleep sells' could actually work.

"It (New York) was one of the best examples of the combination of fantastic products and great marketing and it really inspired us to just go for it," Tara said.

"We're both of a very similar mindset that you can't die wondering – 'what if' is a pretty overused phrase – so we stopped talking about it and starting doing it."

After a year of product development, the Sleep Sanctuary e-boutique was launched, and the sisters are now twelve months into their dream and achieving successful business growth.

"We're not surprised by the demand because we knew there was a market for this, but we have been surprised by the growth rate," Tara said.

"We're certainly not giving away the online retailing, but now we're starting to branch out into wholesale as well."

"But the business is still in its infancy and both Danielle and I are still working part-time in our own fields while we build this business. The aim for both of us is to make Sleep Sanctuary a full time venture, but we're realistic about how long it takes to get a business off the ground and be able to support yourself."

Tara and Danielle's combined skill set has meant that they have been able to manage the majority of the work themselves, and apart from bringing consultants on board to manage the technical aspects of the e-boutique, haven't had to invest heavily in outside experts.

e-tailing in Australia and New Zealand

1. Sleep Sanctuary is one of the many businesses taking advantage of a growing trend for consumers to hit online stores for their purchases.
2. Leading online competitive intelligence service, Hitwise, reports that almost six percent of all internet usage in Australia is online shopping, while in New Zealand the figure is over seven percent – and those numbers are on the rise.
3. Tara said she has found that as people's awareness increases and they see how simple, quick and secure it is for people to order online, sales increase as well.
4. "I'm a total online convert now – and it's such a great thing when you get home and there's a parcel waiting for you!"

"We've been lucky in that we've been able to surround ourselves with a really good network of people who've been there, done that and we've been amazed by how many people are willing to open up and share their knowledge if you ask," Tara said.

While the business is still just a two-person concern, the sisters have managed to establish two offices, with Tara taking on marketing, business management and customer service from an office on Queensland's Sunshine Coast and Danielle managing product development from Sydney. It's an unusual set up that works well.

"We're both of a very similar mindset that you can't die wondering – 'what if' is a pretty overused phrase – so we stopped talking about it and starting doing it."

"The two offices are a bonus for retailers and customers because we have stock readily available in both locations," Tara explains.

"We have a great relationship – we're on the email daily and usually on the phone daily, and with cheap airfares it's easy to commute between states when we need to."

But the real question is - has the new venture enabled the pair to sleep soundly at night?

"Sleep is definitely no longer a problem," Tara says.

"Even though I'm working longer hours now, because I'm so passionate about the business I feel energised rather than being tired and stressed. We have no excuse now to have a sleepless night." **GB**