Farmers Markets...A New Opportunity for Communities and Their Councils

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The earliest form of retailing was the farmers market. In early Europe it was a weekly event where the local farmers brought their produce to town and set up a market in the town centre and sold to local people. It was a time when the community got together and friends and family caught up on the gossip and events in town. In some European towns and villages, this has carried on as a way of life for centuries.

In the last few years Australians have been exposed to the Farmers Market as a weekly event where local producers get together to sell their wares. Markets are now appearing across Australia and are having amazing success. The success of the market includes the commitment and involvement of the Local Council.

Over recent months, I have been involved with a farmers market in Western Australia and their discussions with the local council. The market is more than just selling local produce, it is a community event and not only helps the local farmers, but brings the community together on one day a week, ideally in the centre of town.

One of the first concerns of Council was how would it affect the existing retailers. We had to get a reaction from the existing retailers before approaching the Council. Most were in favour of such a market, as it would lift customer count figures in the town centre for that specific day. In New Zealand, at one market that I am familiar with, the supermarket gets a lift in sales of 3% when the market is being held. Markets tend to enhance the retail experience rather than dampen it. The market is now becoming a major drawcard for a community and those without a market could suffer if an adjacent community has such a market.

All stallholders have to comply with local food and safety regulations and this is one area where they need council support, but other issues that need to be addressed are providing facilities for breakfast stalls and the health issues that have to be adhered to. At our local market, we have a breakfast stall that is rotated between local non-for-profit organisations and is used as a form of income for such groups.

We have also worked closely with the local schools to get them involved in food issues and to provide entertainment. We now have school choirs and musicians as our entertainment on the day.

The modern farmers market is about local food and sustainability but it is also about building communities, both within the farming sector and the general populace. It is about providing the visitor with food, but also education and entertainment that is within the ethos of the market, and in a stress-free environment. Farmers markets will continue to grow in importance within the community and councils that are proactive in playing their part will see the benefits within the community.

For enquiries about establishing a Farmers Market in your area, contact John Stanley at info@johnstanley.cc.
Out of recent water industry reforms a new business, trading as Onstream, was created. In legislative parlance, this is the common services corporation which was created to provide services to the three regional water corporations along with the opportunity to provide services to other organisations.

In more exciting language, it’s Tasmania’s newest professional services firm and we expect in time to be able to offer services in IT, payroll and billing, to a wider marketplace. Since opening our doors on 1 July, Onstream has been focused on establishing a statewide service for the three regional water corporations. As the office fit-out progresses, employees are settling into a new head office in Cimitiere House, Launceston - the new green accredited building - as well as offices in Hobart’s CBD. Information Services (IS) employees are also hosted within the three water corporations.

Following the biggest shake-up imaginable of the industry, the major focus has been establishing and smoothing out significant IT systems for the corporations, preparing to issue accounts to water corporation customers and ensuring that the water sector’s 650-strong workforce are paid on time through a comprehensive payroll re-organisation.

Services Onstream currently manages for the water corporations include:

- Governance and managing the secretariat for four boards;
- Information technology, including help desks;
- Account billing services;
- Establishment and oversight of the corporations’ call centres;
- Finance;
- Procurement;
- Strategic advice;
- Statewide communication programs; and
- Advertising

Over the months to come, Onstream will offer market research project management and assist with the development of statewide education programs for the corporations to deliver to schools and communities.

Given the immensity of the task of setting up the four corporations in a short timeframe, to have opened our respective doors without major interruption or impact for the community, has been largely due to the work and passion of the industry’s employees. There has also been immense support from a large number of employees in councils across the state, on who we depend upon for information and advice.

Over the coming weeks, we expect to refine and improve our systems and processes as we learn and grow. The most exciting challenges lie ahead. I believe that with the skills base and expertise we are building, Onstream will punch above its weight. Perhaps the most pertinent opportunities exist in the Local Government arena. With the majority of employees hailing from local councils and Hobart Water, there is a great affinity with the work and values of local councils.

The services that are being offered to organisations and businesses beyond the water corporations range from strategic, high-level advice through to hands-on implementation. Where an organisation struggles to justify additional investment in systems or experts, Onstream may be able to provide a cost effective solution.

A recent example of how Onstream has provided a major benefit is through the procurement of envelopes for the issue of water and sewerage accounts. Using our inhouse procurement knowledge and through negotiation, we were able to halve the significant cost. Other examples of the economies of scale achieved through Onstream were in the pooling of the industry’s insurance portfolio, which created major savings, and the central management of IT services and help desks, and the procurement of hardware and software.

Jonatan Martensson wrote that “Success will never be a big step in the future, but a small step taken just now.” At Onstream, small steps forward are part of our daily work.

If there are any ways you think Onstream can help your organisation, please contact us on 1300 808 366.
Council and Contractor Partner Pool Resources

In what is considered a first in Tasmania, Brighton Council and Stornoway Maintenance have formally signed a mutual resourcing agreement which will see sharing of plant, equipment and labour for the delivery of road construction and maintenance works between the two organisations.

The program aims to create a single pool of resources that supports Council’s delivery of its’ municipal works program, while giving Stornoway an enlarged pool of expertise and equipment to draw from in delivering its’ own contracts.

The agreement arose through discussions regarding the common resourcing challenges of both Local Government and the private sector - particularly difficulties in accessing skilled labour, underutilisation of equipment and seasonal workload variations.

According to Stornoway CEO, Tim Gardner, the agreement has had immediate benefit. “Knowing that we can work in with Council to help deliver their works program has allowed us to employee and train up more people,” Mr Gardner said. “At the same time, we can quote work for other clients knowing we can draw upon Brighton’s capabilities and resources.”

Brighton Council General Manager, Ron Sanderson, said the agreement is about finding innovative approaches to managing resourcing levels through a time of change for Local Government. “This model allows us to keep control of our maintenance works, while improving utilisation of experienced staff and specialist plant and equipment”, Mr Sanderson said.

The scope of the services in the mutual resourcing program include asset inspection and reporting, project supervision, maintenance works programming, routine maintenance works delivery, minor capital works delivery and emergency response. Successfully trialled in 2008, the new agreement was formally put in place on 1 July.

For more information, contact Tim Gardner, CEO of the Stornoway Group on (03) 6224 4774.

Launceston Set to Benefit From Communications Coup

Communications is one of the most important ingredients of operating a successful business, but very few business owners are conversant with or have the time to comprehend communication technology and just what it can do. To date, there has not been a dedicated communications store with fully trained personnel specialising in providing professional communications solutions to business, but that is all about to change with the opening of Tasmania’s first Telstra Business Centre in Launceston.

The new Telstra Business Centre will encompass a state-of-the-art showroom, personal client facilities, a professional boardroom for individual or group technology presentations, plus a separate onsite vehicle installation facility. Clients will be able to access online appointment bookings in store so that their personal needs are achieved.

The Telstra Business Centre will officially open its doors on 7 October and is located at 185 Invermay Road, Launceston. Phone (03) 6334 4800.
One billion reasons to smile

Tasplan Super members have a great reason to smile...well, one billion of them actually. Tasmania’s leading industry fund has $1 billion funds under management.

Tasplan’s 100,000 plus members are smiling because they know their fund is stable, strong and secure and their expectations are being met as we work for their retirement.

Our members are happy because their money is working only for them, as we don’t pay commissions to agents or financial planners, and our administration fees are low.

Tasplan employers are also smiling because they pay no fees whatsoever and we provide local, expert advice to take the hassle out of super for them.

Visit us at www.tasplan.com.au or call us on 1800 005 166 if you are looking for a billion reasons to smile when it comes to super. Get Happy! Get Tasplan!
Quadrant Celebrating 65 Super Years

WAYNE DAVEY, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Quadrant Superannuation

With over six decades of solid performance behind them, Tasmanian super fund Quadrant is looking ahead and, according to CEO Wayne Davey, is definitely not ready for retirement yet!

The member owned fund has gone from strength to strength as the only local fund to achieve a fourth consecutive national gold rating for its superannuation products, complemented by a team of in-house expert financial advisors, straightforward communications and member education programs. To coincide with the fund’s 65th birthday in August, Quadrant launched a new and improved website to enhance its online services. Completely redesigned with a fresh look, the new site is designed to provide the funds 6,300 members with an even more interactive channel to manage their super and retirement planning.

Quadrant CEO, Wayne Davey, said that the fund is committed to constantly enhancing its communications to help members navigate their way through the super maze. “We’re really pleased to be able to introduce an enhanced website that offers innovative tools such as our new risk profiler to help members become even more actively involved in their investment,” he said. “Because the very nature of super makes it all a bit complicated at times, we’ve also worked hard to offer every member a relevant source of information and tips in a much more tailor made way through our new life stages sections. These sections cover areas specially designed for different age groups such as starting out in super, 35 - 49 year olds, pre-retirement through to retirement,” Mr Davey said.

Quadrant started in 1944 when most councils in Tasmania pooled their resources to form the Municipal Employees Assurance Scheme (MEAS). MEAS operated successfully for more than half a century and in 1998 the fund changed its name to Quadrant Superannuation. To view the website, go to www.quadrantsuper.com.

Font PR - a Source of ‘Wisdom and Good sense’

Long time associate of the Local Government Association of Tasmania, Beyond PR, has undergone a renewal resulting in a new beginning, Font Public Relations. With the new name, comes a new look and a broader range of services designed to meet the needs of an ever changing world.

According to Managing Director, Becher Townshend, “We’ve gone back to the early roots of civilization to choose our name, taking ‘font’ from the Latin word ‘fountain’, which is universally recognised to mean a source of wisdom and good sense.”

Familiar faces remain on the team such as Lucinda Bray, Iris Goetzki, Nola James and Sarah Stoneman. Font Public Relations also welcomes Deborah Vaughan who comes with a wealth of experience from the Royal New Zealand Ballet Company and before that, the Federal Department of Tourism.

Font Public Relations’ capabilities include issues and crisis management, strategic communications advice and planning, government relations, media relations and training, launches and event management, newsletters, brochures, communications materials, grants and submissions. Font Public Relations also delivers media training to Local Government elected representatives, general managers and senior staff.

Font PR is situated at 162 Elizabeth Street, Hobart. For enquiries, phone (03) 6223 3333.