

Driving down food prices

Enterprising Napier businessman Hanno Hasselman has never been one to keep his foot on the brakes. Over the last five years he has successfully built up the reputation of the inner city fringe Pak'N Save, as the lowest priced, yet friendliest supermarket in Napier.

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⇒ From his office window Napier Pak'N Save's owner-manager Hanno Hasselman took in the view and smiled. To most people, the sight of great supermarket shelves and racks packed with remarkable colour and product variety would not exactly be memorable and enjoyable day after day - but Hanno loves it. "I love to get out there, walking the floors and just saying 'hello' to people," he said as his gaze again veered across the aisles below. "I don't like it here behind the desk," he added with a cackle of laughter.

Hanno is one of those unique people in business who see further than the balance sheet. He sees faces. The faces of his staff and the faces of his customers. It may be an over-used term these days but there is simply no other term for the affable Mr Hasselman who manages one of the most progressive

supermarkets in the land. Hanno is a 'people person'. That becomes obvious when he does abandon the desk and moves among the shelves. "Hi Hanno!" is a greeting he hears often - and never tires of.

"To me this has always been about people. It's about creating and providing a customer experience - that's why we put the café in," he said. "People love coffee so we got the very best Italian coffee machine to make fine coffee for them."

Major Napier employer

It is the latest addition to a colourful, cheerful and welcoming shopping environment. There are now about 300 full and part-time people working at the city's smartest supermarket which opened in December 2004 - a far cry from when Hanno started out in the 'grocery game'

more than a quarter century ago when he took a half-share in his brother's small grocery store. It all grew from there.

But it was a people thing then and despite the massive expansion in his business life it is still very much a people thing today. Time and successful growth has not dented Hanno's determination to make shopping both enjoyable and friendly on the old wallet and purse.

Born in Rotterdam, he arrived in New Zealand about 40 years ago, and apart from a two-year stint in Australia chasing the good money in iron ore mining, has embraced the bay's lifestyle. And the people of the bay have embraced him. His daughter Sonya and son-in-law Robie Watson have followed him into the business, and they pursue the same philosophy of cutting costs back so that prices are lower. Permanently lower. "We don't do specials,"





CLOCKWISE: Happy smiles everywhere day and night. It's a family affair, Hanno (centre) with daughter Sonya and son in law Robie plus the grandchildren!

Hanno said. "Everything is always lower."

Robie said he hears it from customers all the time. "They always come back, and it's not just because of the prices. It is the atmosphere, the whole culture. We are relating to people here."

It is a culture embedded into the minds of the cheerful staff from the day they start work. Group sessions in customer service form a huge part of the induction process. And that process is ongoing, and reflected in a series of small framed notes in the foyer of the supermarket's administration centre. 'Price Integrity is Earned' one reads. 'Our Philosophy and Concept Can Only be Learned by Living it Daily' reads another. And – 'You Never Get a Second Chance to Make a Good Impression'.

Leading the way

That is evident in one of the points of difference Hanno and the team have instilled into the staff. "If someone asks where something is we don't point them in the direction or tell them which aisle," Sonya says. "We take them there. We take them right to the product." And if the item is a rarity or not in stock for some reason then staff will advise on the best alternative.

Regularly talking to the customers, listening to them, has always been top of the list. It was customer feedback which led to Hanno and his customer focused Pak'N Save crew extending the chiller section so that they could

accommodate more 'pick and run' pre-packed meat lines. "People might only want two or three slices of ham so that's what we are giving them," Hanno said. "More selection. You watch people and you analyse what they do, what they are looking for. You must always look at the business from the shopper's point of view."

Robie chipped in and said, "Don't become store blind." As he explained, the business is ever-changing, as is customer choice and spending habits, so monitoring and adjusting the business is a daily thing.

It is clearly a winning philosophy as the level of shopper numbers and turnover has shown a rise, despite the hand-wringing and rumblings of discontent in some business sectors about a global economic downturn.

"What recession?" Hanno remarked with a smile. It was all about moving with the times and what the times threw at you.

"Recessions," he said in a tone of disdain. "They come and they go. You just have to stay positive." Positive and confident, and what better example of confidence than hearing Hanno say he often tells some customers to, "Go shop somewhere else and see what you think." With a grin he added, "They always come back here."

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