

Business Small business Entrepreneur

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## Mr World is flexing muscle worth \$16.9 million

Grant Mayo likes to get big, fast.

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Grant Mayo, the boss of Nutrition Warehouse – one of Australia's fastest growing businesses, according to BRW's Fast 100 list – has a record for starting projects lean and quickly adding bulk.

In 1992 he joined a gym in Newcastle because he wanted to add 10 kilograms to his “slim build”.



Grant Mayo: loves big business.

By 1997 he was Mr Australia and added body-building's top gong, Mr World, to his list of awards.

“It's funny, I didn't even like body-builders. I thought they were all weirdos,” he says.

“But I have always been driven and at one point was training six days a week. In hindsight it was preparing me for the business world.”

At 27, the professional body-builder quit competitions – “there wasn't anything else I wanted” – and when he moved to Queensland in 2001 he was unsure of his next career direction.

It found him during “a light bulb moment” when he was a sales representative for a supplements wholesaler.

“I noticed there were all these 'health food' shops but no supplements' shops and thought 'wow, that's weird'. Here I am surrounded by the beautiful people and there is nowhere I can buy training supplements. That was when the light bulb went off. I didn't have any money but knew exactly what I wanted to do.”

Five years (and a partnership in Australian Sports Nutrition) later, in 2008 he launched Nutrition Warehouse.

Its first store was in the southern Brisbane suburb of Underwood.

It made a profit in its first year and sales worth \$750,000 – all the proof Mayo needed that his no-frills, highly customer-focused warehouse business model would work.

“I needed to be my own boss if I was to follow my vision of a warehouse retail experience with lots of stock pallets, bulky shelving, no body-builder posters or anything intimidating for people who are not elite athletes, but interested in learning more about dietetics and nutrition from staff with solid backgrounds in sports training,” Mayo says.

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“I didn't think shiny lights and polished floorboards like others were using could attract the broader market.”

Mayo spent two years tweaking his retail model before, in 2010, his company opened its third shop; a “mega warehouse” in the Gold Coast suburb of Ashmore. The 300-square-metre outlet was a game changer.

Its scale and profit boosted Mayo's confidence and spawned three years' rapid expansion.

In 2011-2012, Nutrition Warehouse turned over \$10.42 million and reached the *BRW* Fast 100 list at No. 9 before its turnover grew to \$16.9 million last financial year based on 612,000 items sold, pushing it to No. 8 on the list.

It is tracking to post \$30 million turnover in 2013-2014, Mayo says.

“Once we got the model working with those first three stores, it was just a matter of rolling out more stores every year. We had the formula right.”

Today the chain has 47 staff in 14 leased outlets, including a dozen in Queensland and two in Sydney.

It plans to add six outlets each year to supplement its booming online sales channel, which captures about 35 per cent of its total sales, a percentage set to grow since the purchase of a \$1.8 million warehouse on the Gold Coast from which all online orders will be distributed.

Finding staff who “fit the culture” often takes much searching. “Every team member goes through our week-long Nutrition Warehouse training academy but it makes it much easier to help our customers when our people are already genuinely passionate about sports training and nutrition, as you can't teach passion.”

The biggest operational challenge has been finding suitably big retail locations. The warehouses need to be at least 100 sq m, highly visible, close to gyms and “have a good vibe”, Mayo says, adding that “the sky is the limit” for his industry as more people place greater focus on dietary needs when sports training.

His advice to aspiring moguls is simple: find something that “feels like fun”.

“If I said I was going to set up golf shops, it just wouldn't work. I am not passionate about golf.

“Ten years from now we will be market leaders but success is not about a number; it is finding something that makes you want to skip to work.”