

Published <https://nzentrepreneur.co.nz/>

14 October 2020

Profile: ABC Software

Founder: Sharon Chapman

HQ: Hawke's Bay

WHAT PROBLEMS DO YOU SOLVE AND WHAT PRODUCTS OR SERVICES DO YOU SELL?

ABC Software takes the paper and pen out of the packhouse and orchards. We make smart, easy-to-use software solutions.

Our on-orchard software, ABCgrower, allows information to be collected out in the orchard. It is in the cloud and is a combination of website and app. The app works without an internet connection, which is very important.

Our packhouse software, ABCpacker, manages the trace of the fruit all the way to the customer. In doing so, we again remove the pen and/or excel spreadsheets. Despatch docket and sales invoices generate automatically. Packhouse charges and grower payments are managed at the click of a button. Data is only ever entered once and used in many different ways.

WHO AND WHERE ARE YOUR TARGET CUSTOMERS?

Currently our customers are packhouses and orchards in Australasia. There is a lot of opportunity for growth. Traditionally growers have been slow adopters of technology but this is changing and the rate of change is accelerating.

HOW AND WHEN DID YOU FIRST COME UP WITH THE IDEA FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

I started ABC Software 23 years ago. I had returned from several years overseas and liked the idea of being my own boss. I planned to start a family, (which happened and is why I can always remember the age of ABC because my daughter was born around the same time); and that was another reason to be self-employed.

Entering into the horticulture sector came later when I built some software for an orchard in Hastings. That led onto some other local packhouses and eventually we became a supplier to Mr Apple.

Enquiries started coming from Australia about four years ago; we decided it was time to build some products rather than just doing bespoke software. That was a pivotal decision; we are primarily focused in the horticulture sector and product sales.



ABC Software founder Sharon Chapman

WHAT ARE THREE THINGS ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS THAT YOU ARE PROUD OF?

- I have a team of very clever people who embrace technology tools to make smart, easy to use software.
- Everything we do is focused on how it will make life easier for our clients. We are client-focused and client-driven.
- Our culture. We have a flat organisation. Everyone looks after their corner and we look after each other. There is plenty of banter and laughter. Balance is important and we walk the talk.

It's our job to make yours easier.

HOW DO YOU MARKET YOUR BUSINESS AND WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR OTHERS AROUND MARKETING?

Until recently marketing has been organic through word of mouth and people finding us via our website. Now with ABCpacker and ABCgrower, we will take a proactive and strategic approach to reach our key markets.

Marketing and pricing are the two most challenging aspects. It is easy to spend a lot of money without getting the desired result. We are still developing our marketing strategy and are continually testing the waters. We own the strategy and use external suppliers to help us as required.

WHAT'S BEEN THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU'VE FACED IN BUILDING YOUR BUSINESS SO FAR?

Transitioning from bespoke software development to product sales. The first means you are commissioned to build some specific solution, and price is negotiated and agreed. Basically, you are being paid to work. Product sales, on the other hand, has us creating a product with the hope of making sales. Whilst this is all turning out well, it was a bit nerve wracking along the way.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST ENTREPRENEURSHIP LESSON YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH OTHER KIWIS THINKING OF STARTING THEIR OWN BUSINESS?

For me, it has been ensuring I have strong resilience, the right attitude and perspective.

I take my company and my responsibility as an employer seriously. At times it is a rollercoaster ride so having resilience is important.

Don't worry, be happy; what is the worst thing that can happen? No one died; they can only say no. They are my go-to mantras. If it all goes to hell in a handbasket, I'll get a job serving beer in a pub (my daughter tells me I am too old for front of house and will have to get a job in the kitchen).

All of these ideas keep the perspective that my company is part of my life, it is not the whole of my life. Right now, I am having a lot of fun and it has mostly been that way for 23 years.

HOW HAS YOUR BUSINESS ADAPTED TO THE CHALLENGES OF COVID-19?

We primarily service essential industry (fruit growers and packers) and up to this point, we have been unaffected by COVID.

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE NEXT 12-18 MONTHS?

We are in expansion mode. We have made two new hires, one to free up time for me so I can focus on sales; and a new developer. Our product suite is strong, orchards are ripe for the adoption of technology (pun intended). ABC is well positioned to be at the forefront of that adoption and become market leaders in our sector.

WHAT'S GREAT ABOUT HAWKE'S BAY?

What's not to love? 15 minutes to work, good business networks, excellent support organisations such as Business Hawke's Bay, Chamber of Commerce, and Callaghan Innovation to name a few. Great work-life balance, affordable flights if you plan ahead, and lots of technology companies doing really cool stuff. Hawke's Bay feels like it is the best place to be.



ABC Software supports multiple label formats and runs reconciliation and analysis reporting for orchard defect sorters