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OUT NOW

TOP OF HIS GAME

Catherine Woods chats to DKM's **Dorry Kordahi** about his journey from apprentice hairdresser to brand master.

Dorry Kordahi was running a company turning over more than \$3 million a year at an age when most people are just beginning to work their way up the corporate ladder. In late 2002, while in his mid-20s, he founded Dorry Kordahi Management (DKM). DKM was initially a solutions and management company that sold promotional products, but Kordahi has since broadened the scope of what the business offers.

Though his success has reaped him great rewards, his start in business was reassuringly humble. Feeling dissatisfied with his position as an apprentice hairdresser in Sydney's west, he left to join a small family business selling promotional clothing. Five years in that industry gave him a thorough appreciation of its intricacies, and a strong desire to set out on his own and prove his knowledge could sustain his own business.

A life-altering trip to Europe allowed him to define his goals, and gain essential perspective on his own life and future. "It was about broadening my thinking," he explains. "It's very exciting to travel to Europe and see what's going on. Having a greater perspective is an important part of having the confidence to break free and start your own thing."

Initially planned as a 10-week backpacker trip, Kordahi spent six months away before deciding to come back to Australia. On his return, he took advantage of his experience with promotional products and his understanding of the importance of image and brand in successful marketing to start his own brand solutions and management business. With hindsight, he can see that his lack of formal education perhaps enabled him to overlook the risks and enhanced his professional outlook. "DKM

is about creating a fresh approach. I've dealt with lots of people with degrees and most of them think the same way. They have all learned the orthodox way of thinking about marketing."

Which brings us to the DKM philosophy. Kordahi believes there are four keys to success in any business: image, perception, differentiation and a point of difference. His two key rules for successfully running a business are: firstly, have the confidence to stand on your own and believe in yourself and secondly, have a big picture, dream and plenty of perspective.

Kordahi's own perspective was naturally shaped by his European experience. His travelling enabled him to identify key differences between the promotions industry here and overseas. "Europe is very image conscious. Everything is so well done. They have so much style. You don't see the usual gear, everything is carefully thought out. Why don't Australians take the same degree of care with their image as they do in Europe?"

His devotion to style and detail was recognised recently when the DKM logo was named one of the world's most exceptional by international agency LogoLounge. It was in high calibre company, along with Microsoft, General Electric, Intel and Bentley. The success of DKM to a large extent can be traced to his passion and devotion for developing the DKM brand itself. "We look after our brand," he states with pride. "If we can't look after our own brand, how could we ask you to trust us with yours?"

A role model for young business professionals himself, Kordahi names Richard Branson as an inspiration. "Nobody understands branding better. Virgin is the greatest brand in the world. What other brand can be used for airlines, credit cards, superannuation, record stores, mobile phones, you name it!" In terms of Australian influences, he identifies John Symond. "I think Australia's most distinctive brand has to be Aussie Home Loans. I think Symond has done a great job building that brand. I want to be known as having done as good a job as he has done."

Like Branson and Symond, Kordahi embodies confidence, and doesn't flinch at difficult client requests. "The really hard ones are the last minute jobs. A campaign is ready to go and the supplier lets them down. Once we had a client ring on a Thursday in a panic, and we had a sample to them ex-China by Monday."

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Kordahi has also used his management experience with great success in another field – talent management and has netted some impressive clients including basketball star Kavossy Franklin and high-profile *Australian Idol* finalist, Cosima De Vito. De Vito signed a management deal with DKM earlier this year with plans to record a second album. As for Kavossy Franklin, the official NBL web site credits Dorry Kordahi Management with establishing a “reputation for providing high-quality imports.”

Along with celebrity clients, he also manages DKwear, the house brand, which he hopes will become a household name. To achieve this, his strategy involves a clear and simple method. "We try to get people to open up and talk about the values that sit behind their brand, then come up with ideas and concepts that build on that and reinforce and drive those values out into the market. It's really important that people understand that when they put their brand on a promotional product, their brand takes on the attributes of that product. If it's a cheap plastic item then it makes the brand look cheap."

Between managing high-profile clients, handling urgent client requests and constantly developing new business ideas, does Kordahi struggle to find a quiet moment?

"I have a million things going on all the time," he admits. "But I have a great team of people around me. That's critical to success. Business is a team sport." **M**
