

# This incubator hatches food businesses

## Case study

**Who** Jane Del Rosso  
**What** My Other Kitchen  
**Where** East Bentleigh, Vic  
**When** 2009  
**Web** myotherkitchen.com.au

Jane Del Rosso describes My Other Kitchen as a kitchen incubator.

The US is the only other country where kitchen incubators are formalised. 'Over there, they're on every street corner,' Ms Del Rosso says. 'A lot of them are government funded; a lot deal in minority groups, whether disadvantaged, students or ethnic groups – there's a Hawaiian kitchen incubator, for instance, that's run like a community kitchen where they come in and hold their events and cooking classes.'

The fully fitted-out kitchen, just under 190 sq m, is set up as a commercial kitchen where businesses can use the facilities. A separate dining room can be seated theatre style and a pop-up shop appears at various times, selling produce made by small businesses that use the kitchen.

'There are some shared kitchens in Melbourne that you can let yourself in, let yourself out,' Jane explains, 'and the Business Enterprise Centres offer business help. So here we've tried to combine those two models – the essence for me is the business help, but that's not as obvious when you walk in the door.'

### Breaking new ground

She had to work out the business model without any precedents here, 'so it was a lot of finger-in-the-air stuff'. The company name My Other Kitchen gives ownership to people working in there – 'Oh yes, I make my jams in my other kitchen.'

'We put the website up in September 2008, just to see if there was anyone interested in such a concept,' Jane says. 'The response was such that we brought our plans forward, found a shop in February 2009 and opened the doors after fit-out in July that year.'

A lot of development was driven by the customers in the beginning, because no one knew what a kitchen incubator is. Jane's first client was running Italian cooking classes. 'I remember scrambling for chairs 'cause my dining-room chairs hadn't arrived by the time she was supposed to use it.

'Understanding who was coming through as a producer was a learning curve.'

### Business help

Many people come in with a passion for making a product, but don't understand the business model behind replicating a product successfully, so Jane sees teaching the business side as the crucial part.

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'I get that all the time: "My husband says I should do this for a living". I go, "Okay, so how much is your husband going to pay for those cupcakes?"'

'The business tasks enable them to come in and make more of their product that they're passionate about. They've got a minimum four hours to come in, to set up – a couple of different businesses can work in there – and they can move tables around, there's all the equipment and they can organise their time.'

'If they're selling food to the public they need to be registered with the council that they're producing in. They also need help around packaging, labelling, branding –



things that any other business needs as well, but in a food sense they're just that little bit different – and the food laws that they need to comply with are complex sometimes.'

### Plans

The plan is to grow into a hub. Many hubs deal in technology businesses where the infrastructure isn't a huge cost, but in a commercial kitchen the infrastructure is expensive. 'You've got all your prep equipment, your cooking equipment, your fridges and freezers, and also your clean-up equipment and the hidden costs like the flooring, the plumbing, the grease trap underneath the car park – the things people don't see in a commercial kitchen.'

Jane plans to fit out part of the premises as retail for the gorgeous products coming out of the kitchen, but she's on the hunt for new premises to add office space.

As My Other Kitchen runs business workshops, it's created a big network. 'So there's a branding lady that I refer people to, we have a website developer, a marketing company that we prefer; a food safety trainer comes in or does online training, the food scientist picks up new products; for instance, being start-ups they need to comply with the food laws and part of those laws is the use-by date.'

'I've got the network, I've got the kitchen, now I need a space for people to be able to do those business tasks and make contact with the greater network.'

**Jackey Coyle**