Image by Billy Button Photography

The Reuse Shed

Overview

The Reuse Shed was founded by John and Jan Drysdale in November 2022. Set in the picturesque town of Geeveston in the Huon Valley, the business is co-located with Drysdale Engineering, a well-established business offering engineering design, welding and fabrication, and metal recycling services. Requests from members of the community to access the site to browse and buy scrap materials for creative projects have been increasing but the business was not set up for retail sales and was not safe to open to the general public.

Objective

John wanted to have a positive impact on his community by promoting creativity and his own love of art. He and Jan worked with Milca Perez, a specialist consultant in sustainable living and circular economy, to extend the business by establishing a retail outlet adjacent to the recycling facility.

The Reuse Shed was established to divert metals from recycling and extract greater value from the embedded energy in its existing form by up-cycling, reusing, and repurposing it in practical and creative ways.

Milca Perez

Project Manager, The Reuse Shed

"Working intensively with the group, we clearly defined niche customer types for the Reuse Shed."

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Tasmanian Government

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“Where are the welding wizards with the passion and skills to transform this metal waste into beautiful and timeless sculptures?”

Milca developed a business plan and branding for the new venture and worked with the Drysdale team to set up a unique outlet, surrounded by graffiti art and a collection of sculptures created by local artists. Operational aspects of the business have been established, including opening hours, community drop off days, and processes for collecting and sorting metal objects from ‘scrap’. The focus has now turned to increasing sales to achieve sufficient revenue to cover operating costs.

Define the market

Three types of customer for salvaged metal were defined: metal sculptors, landscape designers, and ‘hobbyist’ craft workers.

Prepare targeted content

Milca designed and distributed targeted brochures to promote the business to each customer segment.

Establish relationships

Milca made contact to develop relationships with the organisations and communities that support these customer types.

Outcomes

The Reuse Shed has a defined business model and brand, with identified target customers.

A sustainability framework, professional marketing materials, and a social media presence are well established.

John and Jan will continue to build on this foundation, with the support of their local community.

Lessons Learnt

Establishing a business case for selling miscellaneous metal products and components for secondary use can be challenging. Consumers expect to pay a very low price and it can be difficult to cover costs of labour for collecting and sorting items. This is exacerbated by the unpredictability of supply and demand. Given these economic challenges, many salvage businesses operate as not-for-profit, focusing on the community benefit and sustainability outcomes of their efforts. Even so, a non-profit organisation must still be financially viable in order to achieve its social and ecological goals.

The Reuse Shed is directly targeting niche, high-value customers to subsidise the cost of operating the retail outlet for the benefit of the local community. The co-location of the Reuse Shed at the recycling facility eliminates transport and minimises overheads apportioned to retail sales.

Learning into action

What have you learnt from Milca’s experience that you could put into action in your business? Here are three actions you could take to learn more:

- Watch our video on resource efficiency and the Circular Economy. Identify a stage in the product lifecycle in which you manage materials.
- Find out about the other stages of the lifecycle. Where do your materials come from? Where do they end up?
- Ask yourself: If I could extend the useful life of products and materials, through repair, reuse or repurposing, who would be my customers?