

# sleeping his way to the top

As befits a pyjama king, **Peter Alexander's** biggest break didn't happen in a boardroom but a nightclub. Kerry Heaney let him tell her a bedtime story...



PHOTOGRAPHY: SAM CHARLTON

Peter says he was voted least likely to succeed at school

**WHEN THINGS** look grim, it's time to hit the dance floor! Not a normal solution to a business disaster but for Peter Alexander, a chance meeting in a nightclub with a woman looking for 500 pairs of pyjamas was the answer to his surplus prayers.

Along with a photograph of Kylie Minogue and Jason Donovan wearing his pyjamas in *The Age*, Peter puts his nightclub encounter down as one of his biggest breaks.

With 18 stores newly opened in the last two years, it's been a whirlwind of success for Peter. The latest was at Indooroopilly Shopping Centre but the dust will hardly have a chance to settle before the next ones open – keep your eyes on QueensPlaza and the Gold Coast.

While Peter admits he's never had any trouble selling his designs, he says the pyjama business hasn't always been smooth sailing.

"Even though we were always a hit with the customers, it was five years before we started making money," he says.

"There have been some bad spots, including a shipment from China that was really awful. I rang the supplier but he didn't want to know about it.

"The biggest mistake I have made is placing too much trust in businessmen. Many don't have any morals, they are just driven by money and don't really care."

Voted at school as the least likely to succeed, Peter's teacher suggested he leave school and go to TAFE, but Peter didn't like being told what to do and decided to stay. He successfully completed Year 12 and says this gave him the confidence to believe in himself and trust in his own ability.

"I wasn't a school star. I'm dyslexic and never thought I would write a book (*Twenty Years of Sleeping Around*)."

At age 24, with four years in the retail industry, Peter decided it was time to be his own boss. He identified a gap in the market for comfortable women's pyjamas that weren't flannelette nighties or lacy lingerie styles.

Working on his mother's dining room table, he began making

women's pyjamas for the wholesale market. It was four years of hard slog, with Peter pretending to be someone else when the phone rang to make the business seem bigger.

Success came through a huge setback when a department store cancelled an order for 2000 pairs of pyjamas. A last resort mail order advertisement in *Cleo* magazine sparked an overwhelming response and 6000 orders flooded in.

Mail order proved an ideal vehicle for Peter's must-have nightwear and the sight of his glossy catalogue in the mailbox still brings squeals of delight across the nation.

After 20 years in the designer sleepwear business, the 41-year-old is general manager of a \$35 million company and Peter Alexander Sleepwear has been under the Just Group banner for the past seven years.

"Business was so good I couldn't keep up with it. It was just getting too big for me."

Peter admits opening in Brisbane was a bit worrying as he didn't think Queensland had a pyjama culture. However, flannelette sells just as well here as it does in other states and there was no need to tweak the styles. Peter does promise some diamantes and a little chiffon for the Gold Coast and for Christmas.

And while this winter's styles have been subdued with muted colours, grab your sunglasses for summer 07/08 as bold, bright colours will feature as well as lots of '80s fluoro.

Thinking of starting your own business? Peter's tip is "do a business course".

"I never studied fashion and don't know how to sew on a button, but if I had done a business course I would have made money much earlier. Just a three-month or night course is a good start."

So after 20 years of sleeping around, what's next? According to Peter, it's world domination. He has the bedrooms of America and then the United Kingdom in his sights. The title of his next book might well be *Sleeping My Way Around The World!*

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