

Customer Story: Benny Castles, WORLD



Benny Castles' first love is his WORLD of retail.

He has flirted with technology, but the relationship has always remained platonic.

But now, he confesses, he has been seduced by Aider. The artificial intelligence driven app has him picking up his phone in a new and satisfying way.

Benny is a founder and the creative director and designer for WORLD's "factory of ideas and experiments". Together with Dame Denise L'Estrange-Corbet and Francis Hooper he is constantly looking for better ways to meet the challenges of retailing in New Zealand.

WORLD as a fashion label started in 1989, but in the past 18 years Benny has helped the business grow into a luxury boutique with seven stores. Walk into WORLD Britomart in Auckland's CBD and your senses will be confronted by the exquisite – from high fashion garments to sensuous beauty items and tempting collectibles.

Keeping track of it all– from sourcing, to ordering, to inventory to sales – means making smart use of technology. Trouble is Benny, like many retailers, spends his time working the business. Success in retail for Benny is about personality, not being donkey deep in data.

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- Benny Castles, Creative Director and Designer, WORLD

"I am not in love with technology," Benny says. "I don't even make full use of my iPhone. In fact, the only reason I looked at Aider was the consultant I get to organise WORLD's technology said it

was something he thought would be worth me investing some time into and that it would give me easy information about the business.

“It does. Aider gives me information that’s digestible for a normal human being.”

Benny has integrated his point of sale software (Vend) and accountancy package (Xero) into Aider, which is rapidly growing in popularity as the go to small business digital assistant.

During a recent Mothers’ Day promotion he was able to track those sales and react quickly where stores might need more stock, or to share some good ideas to boost sales in other stores.

“Normally I would have to run different reports for each store, and it would take 20 minutes or more, but with the push of three buttons using Aider I was able to get the information in real time,” he says. “It stops me stressing and lets me work out really quickly what stores are selling and find out what’s been working.

Benny’s “Aider Day”, for now, involves three reports: he picks up sales information early in the morning, at midday and in the evening. Just one of the ways that is valuable is to help establish patterns for staffing levels. Another is: “I keep an eye on what I owe.



“I get a text message from Aider with the information. The good thing is I don’t have to get back to it, even to say thanks,” he says, adding that he believes people let mobile phones dominate their lives in less than useful ways.

“Aider is better than a spreadsheet. It gives you clearer information. I use it daily to get answers about my business. It uses artificial intelligence (machine learning) to be able to predict the information that will be useful to your business.”

For now Benny is enjoying having his finger on the pulse of his business in understandable language – even if it means slipping out to flirt with his phone over coffee!

Customer Story: Jeff Kim, Founder of &Sushi



Jeff Kim could have easily been lured into the big American hotel management system. But spending his teenage years in Christchurch fired his independence and desire to one day be a business owner.

Fast forward to 2019 and he is the founder of “&Sushi”. He currently has three stores in Newmarket, at Cityworks in Auckland’s CBD and at Goodside at Smales Farm Takapuna. A fourth, in Auckland’s Britomart, will open soon.

Jeff is one of a rapidly growing number of Aider converts. While he is still learning and adding apps, he is convinced that artificial intelligence (AI) driven and cloud-based tools like Aider are a must to save time now and provide better business management in the future.

“It’s about efficiency too. I particularly like that I don’t have to sign in each app. One sign in to Aider opens the lot.”

– Jeff Kim, Founder &Sushi

Going back in time, Jeff explains after Christchurch Boys High he did his hospitality management degree at Lincoln University. In the last semester he was lucky enough to score an exchange to Purdue University in the United States. It was there that he was grabbed by Marriott Hotels and spent several months going through the various hotel departments on his way to management.

“I came back to Christchurch though and picked up a job at the George Hotel as restaurant manager,” he says. “I met my wife, Tara, in Christchurch and she had a fashion design background. That brought us to Auckland where we opened her Olivia fashion stores first.

“Once our two children were old enough, I looked for my own business to buy.”



Jeff started with a sushi shop in Blockhouse Bay, back when there was nothing like it in a 3 km radius. He sold that to start &Sushi, taking the name from his love of the ampersand “&” and the philosophy of everything comes before the sushi, including people, community and the next generation.

Jeff is focused on the next generation – from the use of healthy ingredients and sustainable, environmentally friendly packaging, through to cloud-based business tools.

His Aider day starts by opening the app on his mobile phone. That gives him access to a range of tools including Kounta, Xero, Google Analytics and social media including Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest.

“I particularly like that I don’t have to sign in to each app. One sign in to Aider opens the lot.”

For starters Jeff gleans information on the overnight sales and follows that up with a 3 p.m. report on his lunchtime sales. He can get the total, and then the data broken down to the different stores.

He frequently checks via Xero how his net profit is tracking – and keeps an eye on his cash position.

“It’s about efficiency too. During the day I have so many activities that is not hard to forget something, so I have pop up notifications in Aider to keep me on track,” he says. “If I ask a question and Aider can’t provide an immediate answer, the next day I will have the answer and it will have learned how to find that.”

Aider is constantly evolving as new data is requested by its users. Questions are currently asked through the mobile keyboard, but voice recognition is imminent. Aider’s team of developers work through new questions from users every day and devise the programming codes to unlock the data required.

Jeff says he looks around at what hospitality businesses are doing and he says he has no doubt that tools like Aider and automation of certain tasks to save time and labour costs are here to stay.

Customer Story: Melissa and Sank, The Store Owners



“The challenge in running a small business is that you can have all these amazing apps and cloud services to help, but in fact the more you have the harder it can be to navigate it all. I’ve realised that I needed to find an easier way to connect all my business information into one place, without having to open up various spreadsheets. Then along came Aider, and that is how I started to make my data work for me in an easier, more simplistic way.”

“Having AI (artificial intelligence) technology in the form of a digital assistant like Aider really helps to simplify your business and make it less overwhelming. Aider allows you to interact with your business on your terms. I now think an integrator like Aider is crucial to create value out of the volumes of data a business creates.”

“It only takes one notification and you think maybe there is more to this data than I previously thought; maybe I should be looking at this more closely. Aider is going to be great for small business owners and managers – the increased productivity that can be had from using data better is really tangible.”

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– Melissa Macfarlane, The Store, Owner

Five years ago Melissa and Sank MacFarlane quit the corporate world in Auckland and bought Sank’s parents’ business – The Store at Kekerengu, on the coast between Blenheim and Kaikoura.

They loved the lifestyle it offered and the rustic feel of the place. They knew the business required modernising, but they also saw fantastic opportunities to diversify and make the business more

sustainable. They extended the gift shop, hosted some amazing weddings and added a camping ground on bare land they owned right next door. Then the Kaikoura earthquake struck.

With the Blenheim to Kaikoura road closed their trade was sustained only by the workers helping repair the infrastructure. Melissa returned to her banking career and commuted between Blenheim and Auckland. Sank, another former banker, found other local work and kept the home fires burning.

When the Store re-opened, Melissa was already embracing technology she believed would be time saving and allow her a better life-work balance. The couple were keen to move from Sank's parent's paper-based record to computer and internet systems.

A key driver was Melissa was pregnant with her and Sank's first child together. Melissa knew she would have to utilise the cloud to manage the business between Blenheim and the Store and balance life with a baby. She was struggling to be in two places at once, while still being on top of what was happening with the business. That's what lead to welcoming Aider.

The business became one of the first customers to use the Kounta POS system and Melissa soon added Xero and iPayroll. Melissa says setting up Aider to consolidate those tools and things like Google analytics was simple. She reckons if people can use Facebook's Messenger they can easily use Aider.

Getting that first information based on her business data from Aider captured Melissa's attention completely. She says Aider is teaching her what an amazing cloud-based business looks like.

Now with an under one-year-old, Melissa works on the business mostly from home. When Sank gets home in the evening she is up-to-speed on how much has been sold, who has been working and a myriad of other data that can be mined to help drive and grow the business.

The couple no longer base decisions on anecdotes and instinct – Aider crunches the data and they laugh when they say: "you can't argue against facts".



How Aider helped Melissa and Sank:

Melissa knew she would not have time to do constant analysis and build complex spreadsheets. Aider offered her the ability to keep close to the business numbers via her mobile devices.

Aider consolidated the data generated from the point of sale and accounting systems, the payroll software, even social media pages and events calendars, or local weather.

She set up proactive notifications at a time to suit their baby's schedule every day and by the time Sank gets home she has checked the Store's reports and actioned whatever is needed. That could be sharing an insight with staff or checking an anomaly.

As Aider's ai learning kicks in, Melissa will be able to switch on "did you know" alerts – like did you know your sales are up 20% on last week, there's an event near you this weekend, or other trending insights.

She says she and Sank are making business decisions on rostering, ordering and managing stock levels more quickly – and from a more informed position. Even though neither of them are working at the Store 100% of the time, they still feel connected and that they are helping their business grow.