

Sue Rice Swimwear case study

Written by Mark Freidin

Saturday, 20 June 2009 23:56 - Last Updated Saturday, 19 September 2009 08:34



CASE STUDY Sue Rice swimwear - suerice.com.au



The bio

The internet is truly a level playing field. Whether a multi national corporate or a budding upstart, the barriers of entry to the internet are very low. Ask Sue Rice, a Sydney based [swim wear designer](#), manufacturer, retailer and wholesaler, who has harnessed and leveraged the online channel with much success.

Sue's tale epitomises multi channel retailing, entrepreneurship and innovation. Oh, I almost forgot to mention a little special ingredient required – passion!

Sue started out studying design in Melbourne but was persuaded by “a weary stick in the mud teacher sans taste” to study textile design. At Sue's first job at a carpet designer, in her own words she “woke up”. She moved to Sydney believing that Sydneysiders with their passion for the water might be convinced to spend more time in her Lycra. Soon the halls of David Jones were decked in Sue Rice swimsuits. Encouraged no end, she began to enter contests and sell to other department stores and take photos of models in swimsuits and life became a fabric frenzy.

Not long after, women started to approach Sue, discussing midribs, bottoms and breasts affected by time and gravity. Sue went back to her drawing board inventing boob supports and tummy trimmers, which were very successful. Sue was now operating out of her shop (now in St Johns Rd Glebe).

In 2004 Sue was offered a static web page on the City Search website. She was intrigued by the amount of queries she was getting from this static site but communication misunderstandings, and incompatibilities were often time consuming to resolve. The next natural step was to offer the swimsuits online through her own website. Sue decided to learn some HTML and to be in control of the e-shop stall type software she bought from Bizarsoftware

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based in Melbourne. She also subscribed to a website that offered Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) advice. But the biggest hurdle was that swimwear is a high involvement product that ordinarily requires a customer to view, touch and try on the garment. To be successful online she had to come up with a way of overcoming this barrier. She employed a programmer to write a program that would take specific measurements and calculate the correct size for the buyer. Users can choose to use the calculator to obtain their size or can narrow down their choice by body shape.

Size Calculator

Hip	<input type="text" value="111-125cm, (44-49 inches)"/>	
Underbust	<input type="text" value="50"/>	<input type="text" value="cm"/>
Bust	<input type="text" value="55"/>	<input type="text" value="cm"/>
Double Body	<input type="text" value="141-155cm, (55.5-61 inches)"/>	
Fit Preference	<input type="text" value="Firm"/>	

Size:

When she approached her bank manager to set up an online payment facility, he advised her that she would probably not exceed \$2000 per month in web related sales. 12 months later she could have made him eat his words.

When the site launched with the size calculator integrated, it blossomed with returns equating to about 10% of sales. Customers from around the world started ordering Sue's unique styles and designs.

Yet as with any growing online business Sue started to struggle with the management of inventory on the site. If she happened to start running low on a certain style or size it meant manually going into the content management system (CMS) or remove the item from the site. When new stock came in, the stock quantities had to be manually adjusted in the CMS. Valuable time working on the business was lost to this.

Sue applied for a Textile, Clothing and Footwear (TCF) grant to enable her to integrate her

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inventory, manufacturing, retail operations and website . With grant in hand Sue approached [Future Business Systems](#)

(FBS) a Melbourne based software development firm that offered Enterprise resource systems (ERP) to small to medium businesses. FBS had just added an

[ecommerce](#)

module to their portfolio of products and Sue liked what she saw.

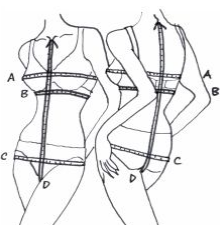
After 18 months of work, the new Sue Rice site was launched. Sue now has a system that is fully integrated, and she only has one point of contact for all technical support. Sue described the experience with FBS as pleasant and she admits that at times she was quite assertive. She gives credit to Mark Silver, CEO of FBS and his team who were very innovative and helpful in coming up with solutions to the unique requirements that Sue's site faced in its development phase. It was also a steep learning curve for FBS as integration of their ERP system with a web platform was in its infancy, so in many ways both parties benefited. Sue also notes that the relationship between the software vendor and the client is crucial, as you are now unofficially in partnership with each other. Sue is grateful for the integrated system, as she was able to return her focus to designing and the growth of her business. **The nuts and bolts**

When orders are placed online, the despatch team receive an email with order details. They pick and pack the order, then release the order which automatically creates an email with an invoice pdf attachment that is sent to the customer. The site is hosted at an off site data centre in Melbourne which is physically accessible by FBS staff should there be any hardware problems.

In the store The Winpos point of sale system automatically updates the inventory database when a stock item is sold. When stock is manufactured, it is automatically added to the inventory of the system, at the same time the website inventory updates. If an item was out of stock and is now back in stock, it will automatically update the website so that the stock on the site is displayed in real time.

A Unix based server operates at [Sue Rice Swimwear](#) premises with FBS's proprietary Harmony software. The system is fully integrated including a complete inventory and accounting system. Through a permanent virtual private network (VPN) the website database regularly communicates with the Harmony server.

What makes the site successful



The online body size calculator is a critical success factor, paired with the body shape matcher identifying styles for the right body type. The technical back end and the seamless integration are critical because they provide efficiency and accuracy yet they are just one component that is part of the synergy of Sue's business success.

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The main success of the site is due to true multi channel marketing:

The website – suerice.com.au , and SEO - Sue is a bit of a SEO fanatic, following the latest SEO trends. Sue has taken time to learn the white hat tricks of SEO.

Email marketing -Sue sends out a regular email to her customer database, with special offers, new styles etc using a third party email marketing platform.

Blog - The company has also just launched a blog to enhance dialogue with its clients and swimwear bloggers.

Retail outlet - Sue Rice Swimwear has a retail outlet in St Johns Rd Glebe in Sydney.



site is simple and easy to use, the menus are well labeled and intuitive and the site is engaging. There is an interesting biography on the site as well as [testimonials](#) from satisfied customers. There are also excellent [articles](#)

about the issues facing women when buying swimwear.

There are consistent use of caricatures, which adds an element of fun and humour to the already engaging site.

The site is easy to use, the menus are well labeled and intuitive and the team at Sue Rice are fondly referred to in various sections of the site.

Sue's advice:

- Building a site and putting it out there on the web alone is not going to get you much.
- Web designers and developers are exactly that. The designers are great at designing attractive interfaces, and the developers are great at backend integration etc. They know very little about SEO. Sue says she will often look at the source code of a site and amaze herself at the lack of search engine optimisation.
- Love what you do
- A website requires consistent input, maintenance and updating. Everything needs to be regularly checked.

September 14 2009 - Press release.

Sue Rice online marketing in action featuring Julie Goodwin winner of [Masterchef](#) 2009 see th

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See the latest press release

[here](#)

Mark's comment: There is generally one word for successful websites – ENGAGEMENT. The Sue Rice website certainly engages the user. Besides interviewing Sue I went one step further and ordered an item from the Sue Rice swimwear range (for my wife). It arrived the next day as promised wrapped in tissue paper with wonderful care instructions. Sue Rice swimwear is an excellent example of the potential of online retailing as a very successful channel for niche products. The internet has opened Australia and the world to her business. I found Sue to be an energised and enthusiastic participant. A sharp thinker and very entrepreneurial, Sue oozes with passion. It was a pleasure to work with her to put this together.

If you would like us to consider your site for review, please contact us [here](#).