

Allan Barber loved boating. He wasn't quite so enthusiastic, however, about pulling his boat out of the water year after year and scrubbing off the barnacles. So he invented SeaPen, a docking bay that's a little like a swimming pool. Simply steer your boat into it, pump the water out till the pool liner shrink-wraps itself around the hull and your boat stays clean and dry in its own floating dry-dock. A garage for boats.

When people saw what he'd created, others wanted one too, and over the next few years Allan and his son Mark made about twenty SeaPens under Allan's house. This was becoming a business! They took out a patent, rented a shed in Brisbane and six months later, in 2004, moved into their current factory at the Gold Coast Marine Precinct Coomera.

There is nothing like SeaPen anywhere in the world. Not only does it do away with a dirty and difficult job, it provides a much-needed solution to the serious toxic effects of anti-fouling paint on marine life, a benefit that has won accolades and awards from the environmental world.

Recreational and commercial boat owners enthusiastically embraced the SeaPen concept which is ideal for boats of six metres or more. But many also wanted a solution for their smaller boats. This led to the development of modular FloatBricks, a high density polyethylene product that allows runabouts, tinnies and jet skis to drive straight up and out of the water.

In 2007, the DockPro business was established, with Mark Barber as Managing Director, to handle the distribution and marketing of SeaPen and FloatBricks. Last year they added a third string to their bow, being appointed exclusive Australian agents for Sunstream, the world's largest manufacturer of boat lifts based in Seattle in the US.

Today, DockPro employs 25 people and maintains warehouses around Australia. About 10% of current revenue is generated from overseas markets including New Zealand, Indonesia, Singapore, South Africa and the Seychelles. And within 18 months SeaPen and FloatBricks will be launched into the massive US market, taking the business to a whole new level.

But two or three years ago, despite all these exciting developments, Mark began to realise there was a problem, one that will be all too familiar with members of The CEO Institute: how do you successfully transition from a small family business to a large-scale enterprise able to compete in the world market?

The business seemed to have hit some sort of ceiling and grown beyond Mark's personal skills. Even though he has a degree in Marketing, this was a whole bigger pond and he was feeling just a little out of his depth.

"The business is only as good as the people at the helm," says Mark, "and I realised there were things I didn't know."

His solution? Join The CEO Institute! Here he found the experience he was missing, the knowledge he needed, and the camaraderie that alleviated much of the isolation all CEOs have felt at some stage over the journey.

"I joined The CEO Institute two years ago, and in that time the business has doubled," says Mark in an enthusiastic endorsement of how much he values his membership.

Getting on board with Sunstream has also paid off, not just in terms of broadening the product base, but by providing first-hand insights into the operations and systems of an international leader in their segment of the boating market, with direct relevance to the course DockPro is plotting for itself.

Within 18 months DockPro will make its move into the US, and is gearing up to cope with a dramatic increase in production levels. Quoting the theory of constraints, and applying lean manufacturing principles aimed at increasing output by reducing waste, Mark expects the factory to be ready and able to double its output within the first 12 months on the American market.

Mark's other key passion is customer experience. After a brief period where he feels they may have taken their customer relationships for granted, the business has recommitted to creating an exceptional client experience, with new analytics in place to ensure those standards are maintained.

"That includes internal customers as well," adds Mark. "Our people need to feel good about what they're doing to be able to portray that to a customer. If everyone's happy, and we're giving our staff a good experience, we've got a really good chance of giving our external customers, the people who pay us, a good experience."



Mark Barber, DockPro