

FMSTUDIOS

LUST FOR LIFE: As well as owning a successful business for the past 10 years, Bronwyn Fenech is also an avid collector of the weird and wonderful.

PHOTOS: Tamara MacKenzie



Creative calling

Ten years on, Bronwyn Fenech tells how the 2000 dotcom crash made the early days of her business in Rocky difficult

GRIPPING the handlebars of her John Deere ride-on toy wearing a smile from ear to ear, Bronwyn Fenech zipped up and down the hallways of her Rockhampton office.

Demonstrating her youthful lust for life, her distinctive auburn bob ignited a sense of enthusiasm, passion and excitement to match her personality.

For the owner and artistic director of FMSTUDIOS, celebrating 10

years in business is a milestone that can only be described as "surreal".

"Time flies when you're having fun," she said while playfully tapping her fingers over an old metal typewriter.

"... On another note, can you believe there are children these days who don't know what this is?" she said.

"I told them this was what people used before computers

were around. They then proceeded to ask where the screen was."

In the beginning ...

GROWING up as the eldest daughter of four, living on her parents' property at Marlborough, Bronwyn – known by her friends as Bron – thrived on socialising with her schoolfriends.

But living out of town proved fairly challenging in Bron's adolescent years.

"Your social life was important. I never had the luxury of hanging out with friends or shopping whenever I wanted to," she said.

Suffice to say, shortly after she had graduated from Emmaus College, Bron moved out of home to live it up in the regional city, study at university ... and get into a little mischief, too.

"My new sense of freedom may have gotten the better of me in my early years," she said.

"I'm often asked by former clients in my hairdressing job: 'Bron, do you miss hairdressing?'"

"You would mostly find me hanging out at the Bird Cage Bar playing pool."

To help pay for her new lifestyle, Bron went through a myriad of jobs, including selling vacuum cleaners door-to-door and working in a kebab shop in Rocky Shopping Fair.

But it wasn't until she was asked to take up a hairdressing apprenticeship that her creative energy flourished like wildfire.

Bron, the hair stylist ...

"I NEVER realised I was creative until that moment," she said.

"I could see the competitiveness in me as I started to grow my client base. I learned so much: building strong relationships and friendships with my clients through honesty and education and, most of all, I found my true calling – to be creative.

"They (my clients) were my walking billboards."

Bron's passion and determination to become the best resulted in her entering and winning many competitions – her successes unmatched by her competitors.

But her true calling was yet to unfold – sparked by a conversation with a client about her online business.

"Her website was essentially a web directory, online shopping centre and E-Zines (online magazines) for businesses across the country," Bron said.

"I was intrigued by her concept. In the prime of my hairdressing career, she offered me a job working for her, co-ordinating a fashion E-Zine.

"I had never used the internet!"

With courage and a leap of faith, Bron left her hairdressing apprenticeship for a career on-

line. But, devastating as it was for many others too, when the dotcom crash of 2000 occurred, the online job was gone.

In an effort to pick up the pieces and re-establish her career as a hair stylist, her father offered to buy a salon – but Bron declined.

Despite the tragic turn of the burst dotcom bubble, Bron could see the internet was the "way of the future" and was not about to waste what she had learnt.

The beginning of a new era ...

AS if starting a business 10 years ago with only \$500 to your name wasn't hard enough, Bron had the challenge of persuading people to believe in a product that had taken a decided turn for the worse.

The first 12 months were tough. "How does one put a positive light on web design when the dotcom crash has soiled its reputation so hard?" she said.

"Not to mention that 10 years ago, many businesses didn't use email. They were constantly telling me: 'The internet is just a phase'."

With much support from her partner, friends and family, Bron kept pushing through, building her client base from the ground up.

Today, FMSTUDIOS stands as a strong website design and graphic design company.

"I'm extremely lucky to work with such a talented and creative team which creates the great working environment that is FMSTUDIOS," she said.

"I am often asked by former clients in my hairdressing job: 'Bron, do you miss hairdressing?'"

"I get to meet different people every day. Instead of giving a person a makeover, it's their business we're making over.

"I'm still creative; it's just a different application.

"To be successful, you don't have to own your own business. You can give back; inspire other women to pursue their dreams in the career choices they take."

Local and proud of it ...

"I LOVE this region," Bron said.

"It's big enough, yet small enough – it's perfect!"

"In a bigger city, you're a number. Here in Rockhampton, you can create your own identity. You can be recognisable. You can be successful. You can give back to your community and make a difference."

Ideal, warm weather conditions, the beachside only 20 minutes away and beautiful surroundings are equally important factors in why Bron loves the Rockhampton region so much.

"But none is as important as the people of this region," she said.

"I have friends from Sydney who have moved to Rockhampton recently, purely for the lifestyle and the affordability.

"The friendships you grow in this region are really valuable.

"Central Queensland has been

fantastic to me for business and, in turn, I like to give a lot back, particularly to local sporting groups, associations and charities.

"It gives you a great buzz to see your logo on a jersey worn proudly by a child on the sports field or around the shopping centre," she smiled.

When Bron is not out visiting clients – or cruising the hallway on her John Deere – she loves getting her hands dirty with a spot of gardening.

"I know it sounds like a surprising pastime for someone as eccentric as I am but it's time-out for me," she laughed.

"I also like taking my dogs to the beach and going to the zoo, art gallery or Archer Park Rail Museum with my niece and nephews.

"Since they have been a part of my life, I'm rediscovering the region in a new and exciting light," Bron said.

"It's equally as exciting for them as it is for me to check out the region's treasures."



WILD RIDE: FMSTUDIOS' owner and artistic director Bronwyn Fenech.