

Natural pioneers

To Natures Organics, doing business is about so much more than simply developing a product and making money from it. It’s about acting responsibly without causing harm to society or the environment.

IMAGES HANNAH CALDWELL

Since its foundation in the 1950s, Natures Organics has been committed to producing naturally based environmental household cleaning and personal care products. It has always used plant-based ingredients, biodegradable surfactants, and sustainable packaging, never once straying from its original vision to be socially and environmentally sustainable.

Managing Director Justin Dowel says the company, which was founded by his industrial chemist father Terry Dowel, is all about achieving success without harming any person, thing, or animal in the process. “I think we have got it wrong as far as thinking that business is here to support us as the community,” he explains. “We are not here to support it; we create it because we need to provide people with an opportunity to earn a living for the whole world to go around. It’s disappointing to see so many companies use the cliché of ‘it’s just business’ to do immoral things or things that are going to compromise the community or people within it. Our business is here to support and create a better world, not a worse one.

“We always focus on trying to be an example to other businesses, showing them what they should strive to be as far as giving back is concerned, because there is no point in always taking but never giving anything. It’s just not right. We get so much love and support from our consumers, and we want to pass that on because we are so grateful for their loyalty. I think they have an expectation of the type of business we are, to do all the things that we can to help improve the world. That is something we are extremely passionate about.”

Natures Organics makes an effort in places where no-one else will because that’s where the people who need the most help are. This has led it to support numerous local and international charities and organisations such as the Cambodian Children’s Fund, The School of St Jude in Tanzania, Reaching the Unreached in >>


Justin Dowel
Natures Organics
Managing Director
Headquarters in Victoria, AU
160 employees
AU\$100 million turnover



rural India, The Orangutan Project in Borneo and Sumatra, the Hamlin Fistula in Ethiopia, and Free to Shine also in Cambodia.

“We like to go to places where there is no commercial gain and no commercial benefit,” Justin says. “We give to love, so we love to give. We have an emotional connection to these charities and we want to see them grow. We have made a lifelong commitment because there is no point giving to a charity once; the biggest challenge for them is getting sustainable income. Therefore, we provide them with a monthly income that they can rely on, that they can bank on, and that they know is going to be there every month

“We are proud to supply a brand leader that is committed to Australian manufacturing and embraces an environmentally sustainable ethos. Natures Organics is a strategic partner whose iconic brands have included A&W ingredients for more than 40 years.” - Denise Van Gessel, CEO, Albright and Wilson

without fail. We don’t ask for anything in return and we don’t want anything in return. A lot of corporate donations are nothing more than an exchange where they will use the charity to make them look good or the charity will promote the donation in some way. Some companies even tie it in with a consumer purchase and give a nominal amount for each purchase. This basically says to consumers, ‘If you buy our product, we will give some to a charity; if not, we will give them nothing’.

“If it was all about money, it would get quite boring quite quickly and you’d get corrupted by the greed associated with success and all those sorts of things. For us, growing our business means we can grow opportunities to support others. My goal is that, by the time I retire, we want to be funding an NGO in every third-world country on the planet. This is important to our staff as well because

they know that they belong to a company that’s doing a lot of good around the world. It motivates them, and it gives us a better reason for existing rather than solely to make a profit.”

Looking after the environment is another key priority that Justin and his team are fervent about. When the ‘green wave’ first hit consumers, he says, the biggest concern at the Natures Organics headquarters was that it was going to be ‘used and abused’ by companies who would slap a label onto their products and try to be ‘green’ without having to do the work. “For us, it’s always about pioneering new technologies,” he notes. “We were the first to trial bioplastics back in 2007, and we spent a lot of money, time, and effort to try and perfect that technology. We are Australia’s largest user of recycled plastic; we knew the effects that polylactic acid would have if it didn’t become widely used and

recycled. It was about two and a half to three times the cost of traditional PET plastic, but its environmental impact was far less. We were hoping that some other major plastic-bottle users would have taken on polylactic acid as well to make it viable to recycle, but that wasn’t the case.

“Basically, whether it is plastics or raw materials, it doesn’t matter what environmental benefit there is; if it’s there and it’s tangible, we are always the first to use it. That’s what our consumers expect from us and that’s what we expect from ourselves. We are here to pioneer all the things that the big multinational companies won’t, because for them it’s all about cost. For us, it’s all about reducing our impact on the environment. What we find then is that other companies will follow once we have proven something works, but we are the first with everything in our field.”

“For us, it’s all about reducing our impact on the environment.” - Justin Dowel

As Natures Organics has grown, Justin says, its suppliers have played an integral role, as has the support from major supermarkets such as Coles, Woolworths, and IGA.

“Our suppliers have been fantastic. When we were going through high-growth periods—funding was quite difficult back in the late 90s and early 2000s, especially when we moved into our new factory—our suppliers fully supported us and were absolutely amazing. We have been very loyal to those companies that were loyal to us through our difficult times because they have grown with us and they have helped nurture us. The best way we can pay that back is by being loyal to them. Then there’s Woolworths and Coles, and

the bottom line is that we wouldn’t exist without them. Although retail is a tough business, they have forced us to be the best we can be to survive and stay relevant.”

Overall, Justin states, it’s the great work that his team has done which has been the biggest facilitator of the company’s success. “Our people are absolutely key. I used to always say that the universe sends us the best people because we are doing such a tough job in such a tough industry. I think karma has a big place, and I am so grateful to have the team that we have got here. It makes it so much more enjoyable when they are all as committed as I am.” ■

“QBM is proud to be associated with Natures Organics, both companies have forged a partnership that has enabled growth. Natures Organics challenges the supply chain to continuously improve, minimise impact on the environment, increase quality, drive out cost, and provide innovation.” - George Psaras, Director, QBM

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