

# HIGH FLYER

In five years, 23-year-old Joe Andon has built a multi-million dollar international company. And it all started in his parent's Brisbane home when he was just 17.

**I**n the internet age, the bright teenager starting up a business from his or her bedroom is almost a cliché, but Joe Andon's parents knew it was very real by late 2007, when trucks started turning up outside their suburban home to take delivery of trampolines.

Andon has fulfilled his ambition as a teenager to do big things in business – he has become a trampoline entrepreneur.

Five years on, Andon's company, Vuly™ Trampolines, now sells trampolines under its own brand to more than 450 stores around Australia. Luckily for his parents, Vuly has long since relocated to corporate headquarters – comprising a showroom, sales office and warehouse – in the Brisbane suburb of Wakerley.

The company designs its own trampolines there, which are then tested against Australian Safety Standards by Sydney's University of Technology and all manufactured in China from galvanised Australian steel and UV-resistant US-made mats. There are four sizes and extras, such as sturdy ladders, basketball rings that fit to the trampoline, and a tent-like trampoline cover that doubles as a cubby house and sleepover tent.

"We were the first to do a tent," says Andon, now 23. "We put a jumping pattern on the mat before anyone else did; we made a basketball ring before anyone else did; we put lots of effort

into branding before anyone else did; and we have a lot of things in the pipeline that we're about to do before anyone else does."

As it happens, he wasn't a particularly keen trampolinist – but he was keen on running a business. From the age of 12, the first signs of Joe's entrepreneurial skills bubbled up when he set up a stall selling second-hand books at a local market. At 15, he started his first business, uncovering consumer insights on behalf of local businesses for use in their future marketing campaigns.

Starting Vuly from home, before expanding to a warehouse, gave Andon a huge advantage. "It cost \$30,000 to start this business, he says. "Anyone is capable of saving \$30,000, but it'd be very different if I'd had a wife, children and mortgage when I was trying to start a business.

"I've taken no outside investment: that means saving and running down reserves until making sales. You've got to work 10 times harder that way. We ran out of warehouse room, so we got a trampoline net, put spare parts in it, tied it up and winched it up onto the roof: we made room instead of paying for more square metres. You have to have that scrounging mentality – you've got to be innovative."

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Andon's a big believer in innovation and setting high standards. He follows the philosophies of Steve Jobs, right down to how he spends a typical day: 33% on people, 33% on products and 33% on strategy.

His drive comes from passion – something he continually shares with his staff. "We eat, drink and sleep trampolines and customer service," Andon admits. "If you're passionate, people are inspired. Everything we've done that has been great, we've started work immediately to make it 10 times better. If competitors try to copy us, we'll come along with something that's better."

Andon is now planning Vuly's expansion into the US. "Five years from now," he says, "we want to be doing \$100 million annually in sales."

His advice to other business owners? "Never lose focus." **bv.**

Watch Joe Andon share his story on The Big Tour of Business at [nab.com.au/seebusiness](http://nab.com.au/seebusiness)



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