

● Jim Noort hired a portable toilet for the builders constructing his family home in Brisbane and was revolted by what was delivered. He got angry, then he got even: the mechanical engineer started renting his own “dunnies with dignity”.

Three-and-a half years later, the business has 50-70 per cent of Queensland’s residential small builders as clients and has expanded into Victoria. Revenge smells sweet.

After a bad experience with a business, most people simply take their business elsewhere or, if they have the energy, write a letter of complaint. Successful entrepreneurs, however, are not most people. They see an unmet demand – and an opportunity to make a lot of money.

Noort was running a patent search firm and working in invention commercialisation when he had his brainwave to get into the portable-toilet business. This commercial nous, combined with his engineering training, has been essential to his success.

He started in 2006 with a “very old truck”, for which he built his own vacuum-pump system. He bought eight toilets from the United States that were roomier and more comfortable than the local standard steel “hot boxes”, and which had fixtures including mirrors and soap dispensers.

**Dunnies with dignity:**  
Viking Rentals  
founder Jim Noort

# NICHE WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT

Doing other people’s  
dirty work has  
become a sure way  
to make a buck for  
these Fast Starters  
newcomers.

Report: Gina McColl





In an industry in which it was standard to clean monthly, Noort began cold calling builders to pitch his main business difference: a weekly or fortnightly assiduous clean, including emptying of the odour-generating waste tank, irrespective of how full it was. The industry-standard was a monthly good-enough clean. “Nearly all, of course, said yes,” Noort recalls. Within a year, he had 140 toilets on rent, and hired his first employee.

Viking Rentals dominates the “Joe Builder” market in Queensland and its Victorian expansion, launched nine months ago, is growing by 15-20 per cent a month. Adelaide and New South Wales are his next targets.

Noort now has 2500 portable toilets and 20 staff, all of whom are passionate about clean loos and have heard every *Kenny* joke in the book. “Hey Kenny’, and ‘That’s a shit job, Kenny’ – the drivers cop it all the time, every site,” Noort says.

The company has some commercial customers, but is not aiming at the larger construction sites, which have sewerer amenities, or project-home builders, where decisions are made based entirely on price and “the guy who orders it is on the 12th floor of an office in the city and never has to use it”.

**Technology talks: Gizmo founders Danny Gilligan, left, and Brett Chenoweth**

“Where the guy writing the cheque is the guy using the toilet,” is how Noort describes his market. “We’ve got that market wrapped up. We’ve changed the way the industry operates and what builders expect.”

Gizmo founders Brett Chenoweth and Danny Gilligan are also coining it doing jobs most people are delighted to handball.

Their brainchild came about while they were setting up an investment company and wasting a lot of time getting their office equipment connected, configured and compatible. It’s a common and maddening problem – so Gizmo, which helps consumers and small business with their technology problems, was born.

With backgrounds in telecommunications, media and corporate finance, Chenoweth and Gilligan were conscious of how increasing convergence and complexity made the uptake of new technology a misery for many consumers.

Gizmo contracted market research that showed 77 per cent of Australian households have more than eight digital devices (computers, mobile phones, cameras, televisions, printers) that require linking, most made by different manufacturers. What’s more, consumers were only using about 25 per cent of the capability of these devices. In short, there was a huge untapped demand.

Much like the *Jim’s Mowing* franchise during the 1990s, the challenge was to take an underdeveloped cottage industry of one-person local businesses and create a national brand.

Gizmo offers a menu of fixed prices for various installation, upgrade or remedial work, over the phone, online or in person.



Glenn Hunt, Peter Braig