

# Australian small firms take to four wheels

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**Hairdresser Ep Weatherhead has a business that is going places.**

The owner of the first mobile barber's shop in Australia, from Tuesdays to Saturdays she

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parks her converted van at different locations across Sydney's beachside suburb of Maroubra.

Together with one part-time member of staff, she cuts the hair of 40 men and boys on an average day.

The business - called The Barber Van - was set up in 2011 with 60,000 Australian dollars (\$46,000; £31,000) of investment. Ms Weatherhead, 46, says she now has up to 1,000 regular customers paying 25 Australian dollars for a haircut.

She maintains a timetable on her website, so that users can check where to find her on a particular morning or afternoon. And she has all the permits she needs from the local authority to allow her to park and run her business.



Ep Weatherhead (left) now has up to 1,000 regular customers coming for haircuts

When Ms Weatherhead launched the mobile operation, she had been running a traditional bricks and mortar hairdresser salon for a number of years, but as the van quickly grew in popularity she closed the store to focus her efforts.

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The Barber Van is part of a growing trend of Australian small firms hitting the road.

Led by the food sector, but now extending to other industries, more and more businesses are embracing the flexibility and significantly lower overheads that come from running their business on four wheels.

### Mobile back rubs

Andrew Ward, founder of Sydney-based massage business 3 Minute Angels, says that launching a mobile massage centre is the next logical step for his firm.

Set up in 2002, his trained masseurs are currently hired by businesses to provide massages in the workplace, or at events such as conferences and trade shows.



Andrew Ward is hoping that members of the public will help fund his planned Divine Truck

Mr Ward also says that running a massage van could enable people to enjoy a neck and back rub while enjoying a better view.

"I thought if you could look out over the beach or mountains whilst getting a massage - that would be an awesome personal experience," he says.

To help fund the van, which he plans to call The Divine Truck, he has launched a crowdfunding campaign, hoping to raise money from members of the people in exchange for them being the first to be able to use the service.



Andrew Ward wants his customers to be able to have a massage while looking at a good view

He aims to raise 10,000 Australian dollars, to which he will need to add up to 15,000 Australian dollars.

"Even at maximum cost of 25,000 Australian dollars the truck would be a business premises that is less than half the bond on a prime retail lease in Sydney that I was previously looking at," he says.

Mr Ward already has a hi-tech design for his van drawn up, including transparent plastic walls.

"I thought when people see other people getting a massage it will make them want one too," he says.

"Of course we have internal blinds, so if a customer doesn't want to look out, or have people look in, we can make any of the three transparent walls private."

**Shark on wheels**

Paul Sharp's travelling business - a museum called Shark in a Bus - is a labour of love.

Containing a varied collection of marine artefacts, the star of the show is a 5m-long (16ft) preserved great white shark called Frankie.



The Shark in a Bus museum tours Australia in a converted 1957 Leyland bus



But customers can be thin on the ground in Australia's outback

"It's my family collection," says Mr Sharp.

"Dad started collecting in the 1960s, and the exhibition has been displayed at various places. Before my father died he passed on the bulk of the collection to me. So I decided to re-interpret the display as a Shark in a Bus - a transportable museum."

Mr Sharp, who tours the museum around Australia, charges a five Australian dollar entry fee.

"Business is extremely variable," he says. "I have had anywhere between six to over 1,000 people through in a day. Last year... we had 15,000 people view the collection."

## Mobile laundry

The voluntary sector in Australia has also caught the mobile bug, such as Orange Sky Laundry.

Launched in October of last year, the mobile laundry van provides free clothes washing for homeless people in Brisbane.



Nicholas Marchesi (left) and Lucas Patchett allow homeless people to wash their clothes for free

Founders and friends Nicholas Marchesi and Lucas Patchett have their own generator and arrange to source a water supply for free from either

local businesses or a council.

Today, they have a team of 130 volunteers and average anywhere from 10 to 20 wash cycles per day across their two vans, each of which has a pair of washing machines and dryers.

## Growth plans

Back at Ms Weatherhead's mobile hair salon, she cannot afford to secure water supplies for her van.

"We only do dry cuts," she explains. "If you had to wash hair you would require a clean water supply, waste water supply and a whole lot of other stuff. I have priced it and it would be prohibitive."

Yet despite the restrictions on what haircuts she can offer, she has plans to expand across Australia.

In the meantime she has secured a regular contract with the Royal Australian Navy to drive her van to three naval bases.

"This represents the growth I have been waiting for," she says.

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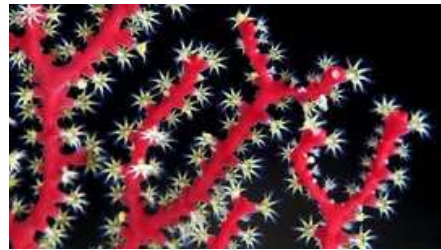
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