



The 'wow' factor comes in wool



Casaveen Australia is a manufacturer, wholesaler and retailer of premium, quality knitwear made on-site at Oatlands.

Since it began in 1989, the business has built a strong brand for its wool garments and accessories, sold throughout Australia and in Japan. However, it operates in a diminishing national textile manufacturing industry.



Owners Clare and Allan McShane recognised in the 1990s that the business needed to diversify to remain sustainable and continue to provide local employment. As a result, they set a goal to become a leading visitor experience.

Creating the visitor experience has occurred in key stages –

- providing infrastructure and visitor services through establishing a café featuring Tasmanian food and wine, and retail showroom;
- training employees for the new visitor services role;
- developing an interpretation program to bring the experience to life; and
- implementing the interpretation program.

Designed for impact

“Each initiative and the related investment has been designed to build the visitor experience in a deliberate, integrated way,” says Clare McShane.

“This is about making the most of the opportunity to truly ‘wow’ visitors. When they have a meaningful experience and make connections with our story and our employees, they want to buy knitwear and they want to go away and tell others about what a great time they had.”

Getting started

The café and retail showroom opened in 1997 and the McShanes entered a period of working to better understand visitor expectations and requirements, gathering anecdotal feedback and conducting customer surveys.

In 2003, they began offering low-key factory tours to test market interest and gauge the issues from a business perspective, as part of the lead-up to developing an interpretation program.

They also checked out tourism funding programs and prepared a successful submission for a grant under the merit-based Australian Tourism Development Program. “It takes time to prepare that kind of funding submission but I’d encourage others to do it,” Clare says.

In early 2006, an interpretation consultant was commissioned to develop a formal Casaveen Interpretation Plan, using Thematic Interpretation methodology.

Themes at the centre of the program

The first step was to conduct a workshop on-site to develop themes – ‘take-home messages’ or ‘big ideas’ – around which the program would be designed. Participants in the workshop included employees, representatives of the local community and history group, and a graphic designer.

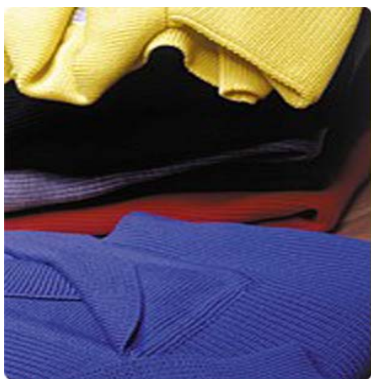
Powerful interpretation for long-lasting effect

“We knew about Thematic Interpretation and really felt it would add to our bottom line – and also be a good approach to use in sharing the significance of the Casaveen and Oatlands story.

“We only have visitors here for half an hour or an hour and we felt that by using themes, we would have the greatest chance of delivering powerful interpretation for long-lasting effect,” Clare McShane says.

Three primary themes and two secondary themes emerged.

Primary themes were identified as those themes essential for visitors to “get what makes Casaveen tick”. They focussed on the point of difference for the experience – one of the last opportunities to see garments genuinely manufactured in Australia – the role of Casaveen in the survival of the local community, and the compelling personal story of the founders of the business.



Secondary themes add further depth to the interpretation by delivering messages about the fact that employees are a living part of the local heritage, and the way that Casaveen garments celebrate the joy of colour.

A purposeful approach

The McShanes were actively involved in interpretation planning, which also involved developing a visitor profile as a basis for identifying interpretive audiences; setting goals and identifying goal outcomes; identifying stages in the interpretive journey; developing a media matrix for each audience; an implementation plan; and direction on evaluation.

The media matrices identified which themes would be delivered to each audience, and the media to be used in delivering the themes. Interpretive media includes a computer which enables tour participants to experiment with colourways, interpretive displays, wool samples and shears, sections of garments, the use of wool and knitted fabric as materials for signage, and cards for café tables.

The Interpretation Plan also acknowledged the value to the business of targeting garment customers with interpretation, as well as tourism visitors, and identified that interpretation could also be delivered on tools such as the annual catalogue, garment swing tags, and the website.

A new way of looking at the business

“The whole interpretive planning process was fascinating and helped us look at things differently.

“It’s not just about introducing new elements but about making sure that every way that you communicate is supporting the themes. One example is the modification we were able to make to the ‘traveller’ – a form that is signed off by the relevant employee at each stage of the manufacturing process for custom-made garments.

“We redesigned it, incorporated photos of staff, kept the process of employees signing it, and now it goes to the customer as a personal, one-off record that shows the garment truly is ‘from us to you’,” Clare McShane says.

Keeping it alive

Casaveen sees the process of delivering a visitor experience, through quality interpretation, services and facilities, as an evolving thing.

“It’s vital to keep the experience alive by continually improving and refreshing it,” Clare says.

As part of this, Casaveen in 2007 developed a manual for guides, standardising tour duration and tour stops; defining what must be achieved at each stop; and providing an outline highlighting key observable features, examples of theme delivery, foreshadowing and transitions, and ways to engage visitors.

It has also developed a film for screening on a loop track in the factory when the workrooms are unoccupied, such as on weekends, as well as an interpretive DVD available as merchandise.

Is it worth it?

It's been a challenging process for Casaveen to develop a visitor experience. So has it been worth it?

"Most definitely! It's been a huge learning curve but the benefits certainly make it worthwhile. We feel we've successfully combined manufacturing, hospitality and tourism in a model that could be used by many other businesses.

"It's led to a growth in the self-esteem of our staff, as they've learned new skills and their roles have become more diverse. It's also a source of great pride for the people who work here to share the significance of their work and their sense of place with visitors."

