

Behind The Label



One product is labelled 'Be the goth who likes colour'.

Unlabelled is a social enterprise developed by skincare professionals, Anthony McDonough and Chris Glebatsas, which donates 100% of profits towards helping save the lives of young Australians. They sit down with Retail Beauty to talk all things diversity, family and why they've made it their mission to improve the mental health of Australian youth.

YOU USED TO HAVE A BUSINESS CALLED LIQUID SKINCARE (LQD) - WHAT HAPPENED? IT WAS EVERYWHERE AND THEN JUST GONE...

Anthony: It's been a roller-coaster ride, but a really important experience that led us to develop our new social enterprise, called Unlabelled. But, to answer your question... Over the last 12 years, Chris and I have been very open on social media about our life, our love, and, of course, our skincare business, Lqd. For 10 years, Lqd was a significant part of our lives; we even became known as The Lqd Boys. The brand not only allowed us to live our lives out-and-proud, but also to be an example to young gay guys, showing that it's possible to be out and successfully build a brand designed for gay men. We built Lqd into one of Australia's most successful men's skincare brands. It was sold globally through Bloomingdales, Harrods, Harvey Nichols, QVC, Sephora and David Jones to name a few. Unfortunately, in June 2018, Lqd spectacularly disappeared, and only recently have we been able to explain what led to this and how it has brought us to where we are today. As the business grew internationally, we took on an investor to help fund our growth, believing that this person shared our vision and plan for the business. Unfortunately, this didn't turn out to be the case, and over

time our visions for the business grew apart and culminated in a two-year legal battle and court case, which we won. The court found in our favour that we had been oppressed as founders. This experience made us realise how important it is for people to talk about bullying and to understand that it doesn't just happen to young people at school. It opened our eyes to the fact that bullying can occur in all walks of life, to adults at work, in social situations and in businesses. But let's not talk too much more about the past, we'd prefer to now focus on the exciting future and what Unlabelled is all about.

YOU DESCRIBE THE NEW BUSINESS, UNLABELLED, AS A 'SOCIAL ENTERPRISE'. CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT THAT IS?

Anthony: Simply, a social enterprise business is one guided by a social purpose, existing to benefit the public, community and environment rather than just shareholders and owners, reinvesting most of their profits for this purpose.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO MAKE THE SHIFT TO THIS BUSINESS MODEL?

Anthony: While going through our court case over Lqd, it was important for us to do

something positive with our time to balance out that negative experience. We started helping other small businesses on a pro-bono basis – after all, we had some background to draw on. We realised how much we'd learnt about building businesses but also how much we enjoyed helping people and how rewarding it was to be doing something that benefited others. We knew we wanted to start another business, but we didn't want to create a Lqd 2.0. While Lqd was amazing for its time, times change. Lqd was a highly targeted, exclusive brand focused on the gay male market. We felt the time was right to create a more inclusive brand that also provided some social benefit. We decided we also wanted to become drivers of social change.

YOUR TEENAGE DAUGHTER, GRACE, WAS PART OF THE INSPIRATION, IS THAT CORRECT?

Anthony: Yes, our 18-year-old daughter Grace's generation are more aware of the world around them than any other previous generation. They have learnt to question where and how goods are made and the impact that can have on a global scale. They are much more aligned to anti-capitalism ideals, and are more social policy focused. When it came to creating the new business, we wanted to start something that Grace could be proud of but, at its heart, would be beneficial globally, as opposed to simply making money for shareholders.

WHY WAS IT SO IMPORTANT TO GET HER PERSPECTIVE?

Anthony: Grace's generation are the drivers behind the many positive changes we are seeing in the world, so we wanted her opinion. When Chris and I were growing up, we didn't know a gay person, or have any role models to even know what being gay was about. It was a label that was thrown around as an insult. But we discovered, from Grace, that four out of five of her peers generation didn't identify as being straight and they didn't classify themselves as gay either. They are still in the process of working out who they are, and labels don't make that any easier. In fact, they can make it much harder. There's an expectation that with a label you are like the 'stereotype' for that group, whereas you're actually a unique individual, with your own thoughts, desires and beliefs. By encouraging kids to be themselves, they can realise they don't need to fit into a box. It doesn't matter what your gender, sexuality, race, religion or body type is, you shouldn't be judged on that. While there are individuals on social media driving acceptance, we wanted to create a business whose mission was to help young people like Grace and her friends be comfortable just being themselves – regardless of who that is. When Grace was young, she was incredibly shy, which is hard to comprehend when you meet her today as a strong, confident young woman. One of the reasons for this confidence comes from Chris teaching her to never be embarrassed by what other people think. As a child, Chris would take Grace shopping and start dancing with her in the middle of the supermarket aisles – people would stop and stare, and Chris would simply say, 'Just be you darling, don't care what other people think'. That's why our tag line is 'Be unlabelled, be you'.

WHO IN THE COMMUNITY WILL BENEFIT FROM THE UNLABELLED SOCIAL ENTERPRISE BUSINESS?

Anthony: Our company mission is to help reduce the incidence of youth suicide. You're probably thinking this is

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The brand encourages young Australians to just 'be you'.



Chris Glebatsas (left) and Anthony McDonough (right) with their daughter Grace.

so far removed from selling skincare products, how are we going to make a difference and how can we do it? Let's start with the fact that every year over 350 teens suicide in Australia and that for every one of our kids that we lose to suicide, there are thousands more who try. It's a tragic number. Even one is a tragic number and it's unconscionable to do nothing if one has the drive, the opportunity and the resources to help. There are a multitude of reasons why teens resort to self-harm including feeling a lack of self-worth, bad relationships, racial discrimination, gender identity, sexuality, depression or bullying and, while these are just some of the reasons, there are many, many more. At Unlabelled we believe that everyone has the right to be who they are. To be able to express themselves and be proud of their uniqueness

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and so understand that they don't need to conform to a label or fit into a stereotype. That's why we are trying to change how young people see themselves, and the world around them. Unlabelled will be visible through advertising and active on multiple social platforms to celebrate the individual in us all and provide a positive outlook on life for those



A selection of the Unlabelled Hand Washes and Body Washes.

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who may feel they're more outcasts than part of the cool group. With time, this positivity may reduce bullying, those feelings of not fitting in, and the mental health issues that can lead to youth suicide. This may sound simplistic, but it is just the start of our initial five-year plan. Our expertise is in skincare so we will start by developing and selling skincare products, not surprisingly, called Unlabelled Skincare. We then re-invest 100 percent of our profits back into our community to help save young lives. Unlabelled is an Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) registered Health Promotion Charity with Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) endorsement by the Australian Tax Office. This is the highest level of charity status in Australia, and accordingly the most stringently audited. It's not an easy task, but every person that buys Unlabelled Skincare products will help us on our mission to make this happen. We believe the only thing that should be put in a box is our products and the branding itself will become a talking point. For example, what sort of reaction might be elicited when you unpack your new bottle of hand wash and see, 'Be the goth who likes colour', or 'Be the punk that likes Beethoven'? We don't profess to be experts in all of the reasons behind why young people suicide, but we are passionate about supporting those who are. This is why we commit 100 percent of our profits to resourcing those organisations who do such important work to help prevent youth suicide.

WHY ARE ISSUES AROUND MENTAL HEALTH AND BULLYING SO CLOSE TO YOUR HEART?

Chris: As a child I was morbidly obese and teased for being gay; a really tough combination at school. I was bullied constantly. Every

lunch and recess period was terrifying, to the point where I struggled daily with mental health issues. On my first attempt at coming out as a teenager, my mum took me to our doctor who told me that I wasn't gay, I just had to pray more. It wasn't until recently, after going through the trauma of our legal battle, that I was diagnosed with PTSD. Most people associate PTSD with soldiers and wartime experiences, yet it is something that anyone can suffer from. Having struggled my whole life with depression and mental health issues and been embarrassed to talk about it, I am now ready to share my story, in the hope that it helps someone else realise that they aren't alone, and it can get better once you get the right support. These are among the reasons we created Unlabelled; so that we can help change the narrative. We want young people to feel proud of who they are regardless of how other people try to label them. That's why we are trying to change how young people see themselves and the world they live in.

WHAT MAKES THE UNLABELLED PRODUCTS UNIQUE?

Anthony: Developing social enterprise brands is about more than just creating great products – we take the full impact of production into account. Our bottles are made from 100 percent recycled plastic, removing plastic waste from our oceans and waterways. We've developed completely new formulations that are free from nasty chemicals including sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS), silicones, mineral oils, animal derivatives and harsh detergents. Using natural ingredients our products are vegan friendly and not tested on animals.

BEING ABLE TO LAUNCH THE RANGE IN CHEMIST WAREHOUSE IS QUITE AN ACHIEVEMENT. HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

Chris: We wanted to work with a large, national, mass retailer who is in touch with our primary buyer – mums with teenage kids. When we first presented the concept of Unlabelled to Chemist Warehouse they immediately loved it and embraced the idea of a new social enterprise. We're working closely with them to ensure that Unlabelled's products will deliver exactly what the Chemist Warehouse customer is looking for in terms of superior quality, value and range. ■

The unlabelled product range includes a range of hand and body washes and body bars. A select range is available in-store at Chemist Warehouse or the whole range is available online through Chemist Warehouse and at www.unlabelled.org.au.

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