

AHRI National Convention 2007

Get great in just 30 days

Rather than choose employees, these Brisbane boys let applicants 'deselect' themselves. **Margot Date** finds out more about their innovative methods.

Their business plan to take over the world started as a high-school venture in hail-proof car covers that failed but now Chris Ryan, 27, and Adam Rockett, 28, run a company with an annual turnover of \$15 million.

The hail-proof car cover cost \$2000 and didn't get past the testing stage, such was the damage to Rockett's 1974 Celica when the two lads threw ice at it, but they were not deterred. In 2000 they established Strike Group Australia, a mobile phone and accessories distribution business based in Brisbane and covering Australia and the Pacific islands, with products such as the i-mate. It employs 22 people and has double-digit growth every year. Turnover this year will reach \$15 million.

After the hail failure, the mates knew they had everything to learn about business and now they will present their human resources system "30 Days to Greatness" to the convention.

"We had numerous horrible attempts at starting a business when we were younger," Ryan says. "We were terrible, we sucked."

One business that did make some money was wine distribution. They had to park the dented Celica around the corner when they turned up for business meetings, but product distribution was something that worked for them. They both dropped out of their university courses and went to Hong Kong for six months where they quickly cut their teeth on business.

In their eagerness to grow quickly, Ryan says they made the classic mistakes made by many new businesses. They made decisions by gut instinct, including hiring of staff and business systems. "We were a little foolish," he says. "We were so busy building up the company we just wanted to hire people so we could keep growing more quickly."

"It didn't implode but it really got to a point where we were struggling. We didn't

have hiring systems, we didn't have training systems, we didn't have accurate reviewing systems. We have turned that around."

Strike Group is now human resource focused in everything, from its hiring process - which Ryan says is unique - to the quarterly performance reviews for staff.

"In a tough labour market our hiring process is actually a deselecting process rather than a selection process. We make sure that people understand what the role is, what sort of company they are coming into. Each of the steps in our human resources process is designed to deselect people rather than select them."

The organisation will advertise a job asking applicants to follow a basic instruction, such as to answer a question and send a resumé. "You would be surprised how many just email their resumé. They can't follow instructions and are automatically deselected."

Other things that affect an application are how people perform in an interview situation. If they turn up late - even slightly - they are deselected.

"By the time we get to the end we find we have one or two great people to choose from. It has been less labour-intensive."

The "30 Days to Greatness" is simple. It is a position description for their first 30 days with the company and all the skills they are expected to learn in that time. There are eight different systems covering the differing roles in the organisation. There may be between 30 and 45 tasks, for example someone in a purchasing position would need to learn to understand the foreign currency implications of a transaction.

"The beauty of it from a management perspective is each of the tasks has a set of systems written to it: 'This is the way we do it at Strike, if you want to change it, feel free to change it but let us know.'"

As they go through the system they rewrite it so it is kept fresh. Ryan says people mostly appreciate knowing what is expected of



"We sucked" ... Adam Rockett (left) and Chris Ryan's firm has an annual turnover of \$15 million.

them. They are reviewed at two weeks and four weeks. These short reviews also allow time for other matters to be addressed. If there was a problem with personal appearance, such as a sales representative wearing an unironed shirt, this would be raised then, rather than at an unexpected time when someone could feel embarrassed in front of

co-workers. It gives the new person a time to ask questions as well.

"The challenge with most training systems is the managers are too busy doing business to worry about it and it is just in people's nature to slacken off on those things. The beauty of our '30 Days to Greatness' is it is easy. Management can do it in a minute a day or less."