

Cario claims local marketing edge for his new venture

MARK Cario says his nine years as a senior retail travel industry executive have given him crucial experience not just in devising national marketing strategies but also in ensuring those plans translate into sales and profits for individual outlets at the local level.

And he believes this local marketing expertise will give a decisive edge to his latest venture, advertising and marketing agency The Marketing Republic.

The Sydney-based agency, which opened its doors this month, represents Cario's return to running his own marketing business – a career path he was successfully pursuing before being wooed to the travel industry.

In the late 1990s, having made his mark in retail marketing with a number of iconic companies including Tooheys, Guinness, OPSM, KFC and Burger King (Hungry Jack's), Cario was running his own consultancy with franchise clients including New Zealand Natural Ice Cream, Mrs Fields Cookies and Red Rooster.

Then in 1999 he was recruited by Harvey World founder Paul Fleming to take responsibility for group marketing and supplier relationships.

They were the days, he notes, when Newspoll consistently found HWT had Australia's highest travel agency brand awareness despite being outspent four to one on advertising by Flight Centre which also had double the street front presence.

He went on to become HWT's general manager Australian operations and a board director of Harvey's Choice and CT Partners.

In the wake of the S8 and Stella takeovers of HWT, Cario graduated to a global role as group general manager leisure for Stella Travel Services responsible for Travelscene American Express and Concorde as well as HWT in Australia plus another 1000 outlets



in New Zealand, South Africa and the UK.

He parted ways with Stella earlier this year and is now focused on The Marketing Republic which, he stresses, is a full service advertising and marketing agency seeking clients across a broad spectrum.

"My business is first and foremost an advertising agency," he says.

"Backing me up I have a really experienced creative, media-buying and PR team – a strong combination with my marketing background.

"Having been a client all my working life, I believe I know what they need from an agency."

But he readily concedes that the travel industry will be a prime target as he seeks clients for his agency's advertising, PR and marketing consultancy services.

"After nine years dealing with the key marketers and decision makers of the leading wholesalers and cruise lines, I have a pretty good grasp of what works and what doesn't," he says.

But it is his work at a local marketing level which he particularly emphasises.

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"I believe I am genuinely good at getting involved with agents and working with them to deliver results," he says.

"They don't want the BS, their attitude is 'just show me how to make money'.

"I empathise with that. When I was at HWT I never forgot it was their money we were spending.

"I know how to engage with them to ensure marketing plans work at a local level.

"Local marketing is not all I do but no one else seems to be doing what I do in that area."

Cario's passion for local marketing

dates back to before his move to the travel industry. At KFC, he says, he was assigned to develop the company's first local marketing program in this region "and by the time I left there were two local marketing managers in Australia and another in New Zealand".

At Burger King, he says, he devised a local marketing program for Australia which was so successful that the company ultimately rolled it out globally, including in America.

So when he arrived at HWT, Cario says it was a "no brainer" that he should look at local marketing, initially issuing an interim advertising kit before developing a full local marketing kit.

With evident pride, Cario quotes messages he received from HWT franchisees following the release of the kit.

One called it "the biggest and best thing HWT has done for my agency".

Another, saying he was "speechless" at the work and expertise that had gone into the kit, told Cario it was "the single most significant" benefit he had received in 22 years with HWT.