

# Right on cue, the Billiard Shop gets a big break

Josh Robertson

DESPITE leaving rivals behind the eight-ball with its expanded retail network, Australia's largest billiard table supplier had been having a comparatively slow year.

Then, right on cue, came a burst of festive season orders, with the Billiard Shop chalking up sales from Cairns to Toowoomba and its Brisbane home base.

Christmas has always been the busiest time, says co-owner Glenn Niesler, whose parents Des and Shirley launched the business from under their house in Boondall, outer northeast Brisbane, 39 years ago.

Costs for a table ranged from \$800 to a stately \$20,000 but the average of \$3000 meant it was a gift with which a family could afford to reward itself, Mr Niesler said.

"Our biggest market is families... (it's) home entertainment, instead of sitting in front of computer screens.

"You've got mums and dads and kids and grandparents and boyfriends and girlfriends and aunts and uncles able to participate in the one thing, a common thing that might bring some conversation. That's what we find."

One of the big hits this year has been the Royalty Outdoor, a fibreglass and aluminium weather-resistant table that "fits in with the Queensland

scheme of things", Mr Niesler said. But the "pride of the fleet" remains the top-of-the-range, 8ft x 4ft Supreme.

Billiard Shop added stores in Mackay, Hervey Bay, Loganholme and Rockhampton to its 11-strong statewide network in 2006-07 and plans to hit NSW in 2008.

All except Rockhampton are up to 50 per cent owned by store managers, some of whom have been with the Nieslers for two decades or more.

Manufacturing and wholesale affiliate Palko, set up by Mr Niesler and brother Paul at Caloundra in 1980, now imports about 70 per cent of its components and tables from China to meet growing demand.

"It's mainly supply now," Mr Niesler said of Palko, which supplies tables, cues, balls and accessories to a global market.

"We can't keep the numbers up. I mean we have 11 stores, that's a lot of billiard tables.

"We sell a couple of thousand pool tables a year (and) to deliver to homes is not the easiest thing in the world to do."

Having built the business into a relative empire is a source of enormous pride for the Niesler brothers, as it was for father Des, who passed away in March.

Ironically neither Des nor his sons could lay claim to being table sharks. "None of us are gun players," Glenn Niesler said. "We all love a game but we like all games, I suppose."



LINED up for Christmas clearance... the Billiard Shop's Marco Marconi. Picture: Derek Moore