



e2

## *e2 capitalises on experiential design*

In January 2010, experiential design firm e2 completed an Enterprise Connect Business Review with David Sharpe, a Business Adviser at the CIIC. David caught up with co-founder Robbie Robertson two years later to discuss the impact.

**David Sharpe (DS):** *How did the Business Review process affect e2's trajectory in business?*

**Robbie Robertson (RR):** It gave us a reality check. It reminded us what we were good at, but it also gave us a list of 10 key areas that we needed to develop.

Since the Business Review, we have built up staff numbers to 25 here in Sydney, and the new offices in Singapore and Melbourne have grown from one person in each office, to seven and five respectively.

**DS:** *So it has been a real period of growth?*

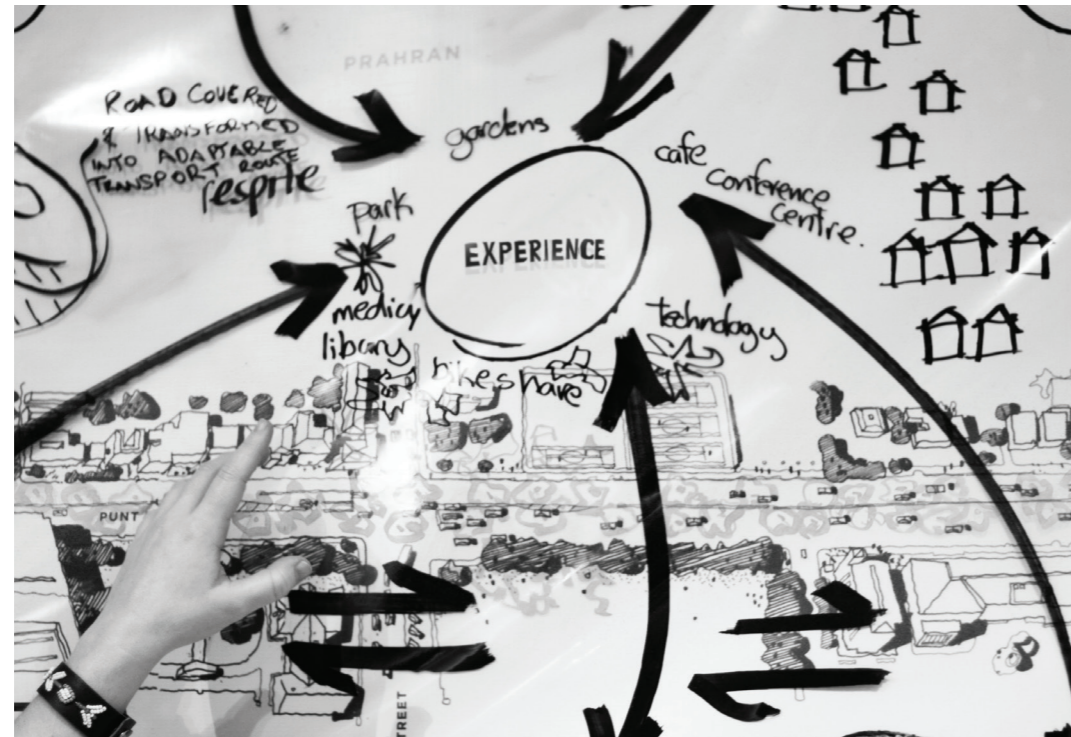
**RR:** Yes, we have been growing year-on-year about 30 or 40%.

**DS:** *What immediate effects did the Business Review have versus the lasting impacts?*

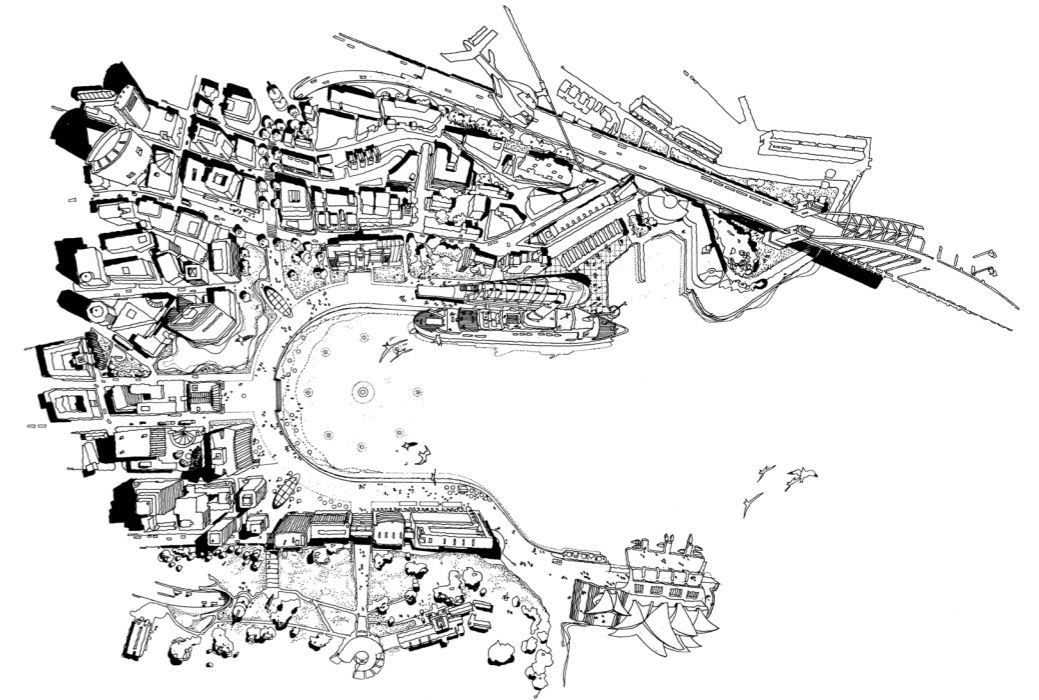
**RR:** The 10 recommendations sharpened the focus of our own internal strategy. We used that list every single month when we had our management meetings to give ourselves a sense check and see where we were tracking on those areas.

We immediately implemented marketing activities, which had an affect on us. We immediately started an extraction from [debtor financiers], which took 6 months. We heavily invested in IT systems and HR processes to improve efficiency. We brought a business development manager on. There were key and immediate changes made to improve the work.

The lasting affect has been that the company is running much more efficiently. And even now, we still go back and do that sense check.



Cover image:  
Alex Ritchie,  
Creative Director,e2



**DS:** One recommendation from the Business Review was that clients were coming to you because it was the ‘Robbie and Alex Show’. Is that still happening?

**RR:** Definitely not. We engaged a PR company to talk about e2, rather than its founders Robbie and Alex [Ritchie].

We began pushing forward our staff at meetings, letting them do the bulk of the presentations so the focus was very much on them.

Thirdly, we made sure the owners of each project were the ones completing them too. There are projects in Singapore and Melbourne that we’ve had no involvement in.



**DS:** What about the staffing of business development?

**RR:** We brought in a senior person who was a disaster. At the end of the three months probation, I said, ‘You’ve cost us money and you haven’t brought us anything in’. So we had a think, stood back, and said: ‘What do we need to do here?’

We realised Alex and I had a lot of contacts, so a better solution was to train someone up over the next year. We brought in a sales and marketing manager who had great writing skills, was very confident, who was eager to learn.

Over the last 3 or 4 months, she has been doing the pitches on her own. She has now won a couple of major clients, which has given her a huge confidence boost. And we’re now moving her into a senior marketing manager and sales role where she will be in charge of hitting targets, KPIs, and bottom line every month. She has been with the company for 18 months.

**DS:** Have you managed to take anything else off your plate?

**RR:** Yes. The general managers are very much running the various offices. Before, I had my finger in the pie in all those offices. Now, I’m pushing back: “That’s your area – what’s your solution?” I’ll give them advice, whereas before I was giving them my solution before they asked.



**DS: The last recommendation of the Business Review was focused on getting rid of the factoring arrangements with your debtor financiers. Have you achieved this?**

**RR:** Yes, through very strict financial controls and putting money away every month to give us a cash flow buffer. It took us 6 months to build up that cash flow to allow us to stop the factoring. It was a big win, although we wouldn't be here if we'd never had the factoring.

**DS: You've accessed TAS funding through the Business Review, which you've used to do some coaching (with Shirlaws). Has this helped?**

**RR:** As a small business we often have to make decisions based on cost, rather than, 'Is it fundamentally right for the business?' Having access to the TAS funding meant we didn't have to make this choice. The coaching has proved to be invaluable to the continued growth of the company.

The list (of recommendations) that came out of the CIIC Business Review gave us a starting point with Shirlaws. We went to Shirlaws saying, 'These are our weaknesses', and we used that list as our benchmark.

Article by Barbara Messer

## THEN VS NOW

### June 2010

Company e2 experiential design  
 Services Retail & workplace design; experiential marketing; brand design & communications  
 Staff 13  
 Structure Company  
 Turnover \$1.7million

### June 2012

Company e2 experiential design  
 Services Retail & workplace design; experiential marketing; brand design & communications  
 Staff 37  
 Structure Group of companies with 3 offices in Sydney, Melbourne & Singapore  
 Turnover \$4million

## ABOUT CIIC

The CIIC supports the business of creative enterprise. It is an Australian Government initiative, part of the Enterprise Connect program and is supported by the University of Technology, Sydney.

## FIND OUT MORE

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