

Born from passion, scaled in the cloud



From a unique idea to make children healthier to Australia's leading brand of organic kids' snacks, Whole Kids has grown fast – and had to think carefully about scaling along the way.

It's a frustration familiar to millions of parents around the world: finding and buying healthy snacks for their kids amidst a confusing maze of misleading food labelling, hidden ingredients, dubious health claims and ubiquitous junk food marketing aimed at children.

For one couple in Australia, it was time to do something about it – and they turned their frustrations into an organic food business that doesn't just supply healthy, plant-based, allergen-friendly snacks for kids but also creates positive social and environmental impact.

The birth of a business

After being chosen by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs to lead a team of volunteers to a remote village in Indonesia to deliver an aid programme to children living in poverty, Monica Meldrum vowed to better use her skills and influence to improve children's health.

Returning to Australia, she observed that food-related illnesses were on the rise, the incidence of childhood obesity was growing rapidly to unacceptable levels, and rates of allergies amongst children were at an all-time high. Despite these problems, she also saw shelves full of heavily processed snacks for kids, with little regulatory oversight around the use of food additives and questionable advertising techniques designed to mislead parents.

Feeling they weren't alone in their concerns, validated by a series of focus groups with over 300 parents and kids, Monica and her husband James used their life savings to develop and launch a range of nutritious snack products to sit alongside established multinational brands. Whole Kids was born in the front room of the couple's small, rented house in Melbourne.

“As parents ourselves, we understand the frustrations, problems, aspirations and day-to-day life of families,” says James. “We experience all these things ourselves, so we want the same things that our customers want. At Whole Kids, we make it much easier for parents because we’re honest and transparent about what’s in our products, and we create products that are all-natural, tastier, more nutritious, and free from artificial additives and GMOs.”

A game-changing moment

Two years after launching, Whole Kids was approached by Australian airline Qantas to pitch against one of the world’s largest FMCG confectionery brands in the world for supplying a healthy, affordable alternative for children’s meals on all its domestic and international flights.

The meeting was a game-changer for Whole Kids, but not because they won the pitch. The buyer power of its competitor meant it couldn’t compete on price; however, the love Qantas has for the Whole Kids concept and values initiated a partnership that has spanned over a decade with the airline supporting and promoting the brand on board and through its media channels.

Whole Kids grew rapidly, assisted by another approach from a major brand looking to distribute a healthy kids snack offering. This time it was a large Quick Service Retail operation with over 200 outlets nationally, and Whole Kids was able to win the pitch, resulting in a great partnership that has grown and strengthened over the last decade.

Of course, the company soon outgrew James and Monica’s front room. Multiple office moves and two kids later, Whole Kids has settled in a modern co-working space in Melbourne to accommodate its growing team, with distribution and warehousing at a purpose-built facility.

A business with heart

Whole Kids isn’t a typical profit-driven business, however. From the outset, Monica and James shared a vision of a purpose-led company. Whole Kids became the first Australian food business to be certified as a B Corp, and a founding member of B Corporation Australia, with a purpose to make it easier for parents to give their kids a healthy diet.

It achieves this by making its food healthy, nutritious, and free from artificial additives and by efforts to drive long-term sustainable change in the way food is sourced, manufactured, distributed, and marketed to kids and families. Through community partnerships with organisations like Plan Australia, Whole Kids strives to improve children’s health and wellbeing via projects such as providing over 500,000 breakfasts in Cambodia.

“Unlike companies in our category that are focused primarily on return to shareholders and use metrics like increase in ‘share of stomach’ as a benchmark for success, our operating model is driven by profits with purpose,” says James. “Our approach is unique and has helped us to grow rapidly, securing major business over some of the worlds’ largest brands, winning several awards for the quality of our products and business purpose along the way.”



Pathway to the future

As the business has grown, so has the complexity of handling an expanding and diverse SKU range, supply chain and inventory management operation, and multiple contract manufacturers worldwide, all from the company's head office in Melbourne. Selling through 3,000 retail outlets, including distribution partnerships with Coles, Woolworths and Chemist Warehouse in Australia and a growing export market, also meant Whole Kids needed a more sophisticated accounting, inventory management and production platform.

Managing accounting through MYOB software and production planning and scheduling in an Excel spreadsheet failed to provide the visibility, flexibility, and efficiencies to effectively scale the business. The on-premise setup, meanwhile, required constant upgrades and ongoing investment in IT infrastructure and server capacity. Whole Kids needed a flexible cloud-based platform that provided a whole-of-business view along with solid data insights.

In light of its growth in export markets and global supply chain expansion, the company wanted more than just an accounting solution designed for SMEs. Turning to the ERP market and assessing several providers, it was immediately attracted to NetSuite ERP, supported by Jcurve. Not only had the NetSuite-Jcurve partnership been recommended to Whole Kids by other clients, but it was also allured by the ability of the solution's features and functionality to adapt to the business as it continues to scale up.

"It was important for us to invest ahead of the growth curve so that we have the systems and structures in place to support us as we expand, rather than trying to retrofit something," says Meldrum. "While NetSuite and Jcurve had some features that we were unlikely to use immediately when we moved away from MYOB, there was a pathway we could follow as we grow bigger. We now feel much more confident when planning our future growth plans, safe in the knowledge that our underlying ERP system has the capabilities when we need them."

Scaling up for growth

If its hugely successful growth story to date is anything to go by, those enterprise software capabilities will be required sooner rather than later. Despite ongoing uncertainty fuelled by the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly around global supply chain challenges, Whole Kids has built a powerful brand, loyal following and unique purpose-driven model, which puts it on a strong footing for accelerated growth in the years ahead, both within Australia and globally.

The Whole Kids future growth roadmap focuses on attractive, sustainable and scalable market opportunities, including increasing its distribution in Australia and overseas through existing customers and new opportunities. The company has a solid pipeline of product innovation to meet growing consumer trends in key market segments. Supported by its ERP system, it plans to invest significantly in growing its e-commerce systems, expanding its direct-to-home online sales and continuing to increase its social and environmental impact.



“Now that we’ve moved to a cloud-based ERP solution, we could never go back to how we were managing our inventory, supply chain, production planning, accounting and bookkeeping before. NetSuite ERP allows us to look forward with confidence,” James comments. “We have a very good relationship with Jcurve and one we consider as a partnership. We know that when the time comes in our business growth journey to fully realise the capabilities of the NetSuite system, we will be fully supported along the way.”