

RapidClean's buying power continues to drive the

Not only a play on words to reference the logo's green frog, RapidClean's general manager **Bruce Lees** titled his annual speech 'the great leap forward' because of the impressive goals that the buying group has achieved, and the challenges in focus for the next 12 months. The drive to create a platform to ensure members' businesses thrive was the underlying agenda of the 21st RapidClean Conference held 16 and 17 October at Sea World Resort on the Gold Coast (Qld). INCLEAN's editor **Kim Taranto** was invited to cover the event.

With more than 140 members and suppliers in attendance, this year's conference was the largest yet and RapidClean chairman Greg Wild made mention of the support in his official opening. "The preferred suppliers are an integral part of the success of our group," he stated. "They provide us a framework of support which allows us to conduct our businesses in a positive environment. Their sponsorship also allows us to host such an enjoyable event every year, and tells us that they place high value on the relationship with the Rapid Group."

After the RapidClean AGM new members were voted onto the board with the retirement of Lindsey Burgoyne and Robert Cappello, and the welcoming of Adam Cameron and Graeme Magee. Greg also signed on to continue his position on the board and reflected on the group's growth over the last year. "We've enjoyed growth this year which has entailed some positive outcomes – the group has successfully reached and exceeded 14 of the supplier long term incentives with the total purchases in excess of \$25 million," announced Greg. "Everything our members purchase through our preferred suppliers is valuable in earning rebates and is what helps make our group so successful."

Bruce took to the podium and reminded the room full of senior decision makers in the cleaning supply industry to not underestimate the importance of what they do. "It is vital to the wellbeing of the community. The Australian cleaning industry employs thousands of people and is worth hundreds of millions of dollars and none of that cleaning can happen without the products you supply," he reflected. "So I ask you to be proud of what you do – it's more important than you think."

He went on to summarise the Group's growth over the past five years announcing that the turnover has tripled in this time. "I've called my presentation 'the great leap forward' because it is reflective of what we need to do to take full advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead," Bruce shared. "We've built a solid foundation that puts us in a great position to take a leap of faith that will lift the Group to the next level. If we can

combine our current strengths in marketing and take advantage of the interconnectivity that technology makes possible then the future is very bright.

"Positivity and commitment is needed to overcome big challenges to succeed and the obstacles we face as a Group are imposing," he continued. "We trade in an extremely competitive marketplace dealing with multi-nationals, backyard suppliers and everyone in between. So we need to work harder to ensure our business model continues to be successful."

Bruce reflected on the Group's achievements of the last five years, which have included adding 22 RapidClean members, releasing 15 specials catalogues, maintaining the same quantity of preferred suppliers, hiring a marketing specialist, upgrading the website to maximise traffic and leads, building a fully functional intranet, expanding the RapidClean product range, building a national account business exceeding \$2 million in sales, and the most important two – increasing purchases from preferred suppliers more than 130 percent and increasing rebate returns to members by more than 900 percent. "These are the numbers that measure our group's success and it is just the beginning," Bruce stated.

With so many goals achieved over the last half decade, Bruce tailored his speech to motivate members on continuous improvement against the threat of multi-national organisations. "Our advantage over this type of competitor is our flexibility, product knowledge and customer service. Our weakness is lack of synchronicity, national online purchasing, pricing and national reporting," he claimed. "We must continue to improve in these areas of weakness or this competitor will continue to erode our members' business."

To combat this threat last year RapidClean purchased a new accounting system and this year significant funds have been allocated to producing a centralised online ordering system for national accounts. "We're driven to embrace the technology that closes the gap between us and the multi-nationals and further distance ourselves from localised



RapidGroup 2015 on the Gold Coast

businesses," noted Bruce. "It's time to invest and move our Group forward."

With the increase in website traffic for online ordering and the sales to national accounts surpassing \$2 million earlier this year, the Group has enjoyed great success and the next step is to secure more national accounts with the purchase of quality assurance to make the group more attractive. "Securing accounts at a national level benefits as many members as possible, so it is a strategic goal to increase this over the next 12 months," said Bruce.

Guest speaker David Scholes, CEO of UK company Nationwide Hygiene Group and joint CEO of buying group INPACS, of which Rapid has been a member for two years, took to the podium to deliver a simple message – "if you work hard together, it pays." David reflected on the formation of INPACS and how success prevailed after some major financial setbacks due to members not having an exit strategy and allowing an 'enemy' multi-national to infiltrate the buying group. The knowledge imparted was timely advice as the Rapid Group moves into the next phase of expanding its reach.

Martin Grunstein was the second guest speaker at the conference and he delivered an entertaining presentation on marketing strategies and customer service. Having worked in this sector for many years across numerous industries, Martin's focus wasn't on how to sell a product, but about human behaviour and how consumers make purchasing decisions. "There are no magic laws of marketing; selling is based on perception – if your marketing is effective then it changes the customers' perception and enables them to justify the expenditure," he stated.

"You're not selling cleaning supplies," he added. "You're selling a reason for people

group's growth

to do business with you instead of the next person." Martin conceded that the Australian marketplace is irrational and that the greatest misconception is that the consumer is price preoccupied. "We think they are always looking for a lower price but it's in the mind of the seller, not the buyer," he exclaimed. "That's why every shop window or product catalogue has the word 'sale' all over it! And this is because companies are too preoccupied with what their competitor is doing rather than what their customer wants."

Martin finished off with some helpful advice on how Rapid Group members can improve their marketing, especially on their websites, to change the customers' perception without changing the cost structure of their products. "Offer non-product related reasons for your potential customers to do business with you; offer testimonials of satisfied clients – consumers tend not to believe the seller but they will believe the buyer," he noted. "Remember, it's not what you do, it's what your customer is aware you do so tell them everything."

As always, the Rapid Conference included a host of outstanding dinners and networking opportunities and each day members and suppliers spent two to three hours 'speed meeting' with the addition of group meetings taking place as well. The gala dinner started with pre-dinner drinks and a dolphin show with the succession of supplier and member awards.

This year's member of the year went to Whereabout Supply, accepted by Adam Cameron, and supplier of the year was awarded to E.D Oates, which was accepted by Lucas Paris. The Rapid Group also presented a special industry achievement award to now retired long-time member Robert Stone who owned RapidClean Newcastle.

Special mention should be given to sponsoring suppliers Royal Touch, Tailored Packaging, Oates Laboratories, Diversey, Solaris Paper and AAMTech-Septone as without their contribution and support RapidClean could not organise such a memorable event every year. And of course, no RapidClean conference is complete without the 'dad-joke' hilarity of MC Stuart White, whose microphone antics were cut short due to time constraints this year... but I didn't hear anyone complaining.

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