



Nicole Gebing

Director – Fix Auto Sunshine

WE INTRODUCE NICOLE GEBING, THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE TRANSITION OF A SUBURBAN FAMILY-OWNED BUSINESS TO A KEY FRANCHISEE IN THE GLOBAL FIX AUTO NETWORK.

I asked Nicole to tell us a bit about who she is and where she comes from. She started off by telling us that she was born and raised in the western suburbs of Melbourne, always had an interest in cars, as well as in boats and motorbikes. She speaks fondly about growing up with water-ski racing, fishing, camping and always being around people, which is something she carried forward into her adult life.

“I was always very organised, which translated into a love of admin, paperwork, technology and helping others. I started my career in the printing industry where I worked in accounting and customer relations before moving to the frontline defence services industry, working my way up over seven years from receptionist, accounts, operations and then on to business services.”

Interestingly, her career touched the coatings industry in a marketing role at

Jotun Australia, where she focused on developing the company website, all the way back in 2000. Nicole speaks of her last corporate role as the personal assistant to the managing director of Saint Gobain Abrasives, a global player in the collision repair industry, before she took the step and moved “onto the frontline”.

“My husband John started his apprenticeship as a panel beater at his dad’s (also John) business, Sunny Autos Smash Repairs in Sunshine in 1985 and has been in the collision repair industry ever since. We started a family and in 2004. I think due to my admin experience, I was asked if I would like to work in the family business initially in a job-sharing capacity – so began my real collision industry career. By 2008, John Snr rebuilt the entire workshop and I returned to a business that had been set up for a great future, and things were solid for the best part of a decade. In 2017, John Snr retired and John (Jnr)

and I took over the business as directors of Sunny Autos Smash Repairs.”

It was clear that the collision industry landscape was changing rapidly, and things were becoming more difficult for the independent repairer, particularly developing and maintaining relationships with work providers. It was also clear that the need for more sophisticated systems was becoming increasingly complex, expensive and beyond their core capabilities as a repairer. “Fix Auto as a brand came up in several discussions we had with customers, suppliers and insurers, so we thought, why not get in touch with them and see how they can help us in our business. This was the beginning of something really special. We signed the contracts in November 2019 with two key emotions: as a second-generation owner, have let our family down? and OMG, we have a lot of work to do!”

The transition began almost immediately. From clearing out the junk, applying fresh paintwork and new line marking in the workshop and carpark, to finally the rebranding and signage. The Fix Auto team was there to provide support every step of the way and the business never looked more inviting. “The start of 2020 was quite an emotional, exhausting and exciting time, especially with the onset of COVID-19. However, we now have an extended new family, sharing our passion to better serve our customers and the community. The greatest feeling was that, ‘yes, we made the right choice for our future’. We have access to an extensive support network and most of all, the feeling of love for what we do and how well we do it was overwhelming.”

“I remember getting a call from



Amazing street appeal.

Nicole because I had not replied to her emails. After a quick check of my junk box, I discovered two emails from Nicole, the first enquiring about our model and wanting to talk to someone, the second a little more stern and obviously disappointed that I had not replied. Thank goodness she called, because if she had not, we would have missed out on a chance to welcome potentially one of the most genuine, likeable and committed independent repair shops into our network. I now check my junk mail every day, just in case our next superstar franchisee is there waiting for a reply," said Stuart Faid, Regional Vice President and head of Business Asia, Australia and New Zealand. "Since joining, Nicole and John have given 150% to getting the most from our partnership. They have embraced digital media and have revelled in using that platform to showcase their business. In the workshop, we have introduced new systems, processes and procedures designed to optimise the business and ensure it delivers on its true potential. Every step of the way they have remained open to change and been excited about the future. They are a joy to work with."

Nicole then explained that taking the step to join the network and become a franchisee was the biggest

decision in the company's history, so I asked her what it was that got them across the line. "The enthusiasm and drive that the team at Fix Auto has for the industry, the brand and their extensive local and global network gave us the confidence to make the change and join the franchise. It has given us a network of like-minded people all coming together, sharing experiences and ideas, which is something that is priceless as a business owner."

There was no avoiding the fact that we are in the middle of a year like no other, and Nicole was again particularly complimentary of the Fix Auto network during what has been one of the most challenging times, for both the business and for her personally. "If it wasn't for joining the Fix

Auto network when we did, I don't think we would be in a position to be trading as we are now, with full working hours, no closures and consistent flow of work. They have guided us through, supported us wholeheartedly and been there with us every step of the way. No matter what comes next, we know being part of Fix Auto right now has made it possible to get through this unprecedented time and we have the confidence that we will be better placed in the future."

With a long and successful career outside the collision industry, I asked Nicole if she would share her greatest achievement as a professional businesswoman, and she had no hesitation. "Becoming a director of Sunny Autos Smash Repairs and working to



Customer lounge.

Nicole Gebing.





make it into what it is today has been the most challenging and rewarding time in my professional life. The past three years have seen us grow into a great local business, and the decision to join the global Fix Auto network has allowed us to set the business up to take it to the next level. The strength of the Fix Auto brand just gives us so much more credibility.”

Nicole is very forthcoming when it comes to what advice she would give other women considering a career in our industry, explaining that the collision repair industry can be challenging and demanding, but it can also provide a great level of satisfaction. “I often call us the ‘doctor of the car world’ because I never cease to be amazed at how a vehicle can come through our doors so damaged and yet leave us in perfect condition again – the process still amazes me to this day.” She went on to say: “There are so many roles and opportunities for women in our industry, from a technician in the workshop, running the front office, and all the way to the person with your name on the door – it really is an attractive, rewarding industry in which to be involved, and I can’t imagine doing anything else.”

Faid reinforced what Nicole brings to the Fix Auto family: “One of the big benefits we believe being part of a network offers, compared to going it alone, is access to an open, honest and supportive peer group. Nicole has been a significant contributor in our network meetings and forums. Most notably, she is always on hand to help with local

social media marketing or share the latest news or information. As a family of repairers, we look out for each other, not because we have to, but because we want to, and Nicole has embodied that philosophy completely. Everyone in the network loves her.”

We turned our attention to technology and the reply I received was open, honest and very refreshing. “To ensure we run the business as efficiently as we can, we rely on iBodyshop to get things right, first time, every time. Regarding the technology in today’s cars, which is increasing at an accelerating rate, we rely on the best tools and equipment in the workshop, supported by external expertise from a professional network to ensure we deliver the highest quality repair and return the car to pre-accident condition.”

However, it doesn’t stop here. Fix Auto, for all its brand strength, global connections, systems and processes, has complemented this community collision repairer to provide a formidable value proposition. “When it comes to customer service, we are still a little ‘old school’, by which I mean providing the personal approach and care on which the business was founded half a century ago. I like to sum it up like this: we use technology to be efficient, but we focus on the human touch to deliver the experience.”

Looking ahead, even in the midst of a Stage 4 lockdown, Nicole is upbeat about the future, predominately because they are now part of a global

network that has broadened their horizons and increased the expectations they have for themselves and their business. “We know we will be secure as a business that benefits from the guardianship of a global brand and we are now focusing on developing our local community-based customers. This mix of a global network and a local approach, gives us a real sense that we can continue to grow and get better from here on in.”

As I discovered during our conversations, Nicole is not shy to tell you what she really thinks, so when I asked her to have the last word, she jumped at the opportunity.

“Never give up, and never give up hope. This year especially has been a tough year on all levels, business and personal. I know that we can, and will, get through these challenging times. Stay strong, stay positive and remember that we really are all in this together. I personally don’t believe we compete with other smash repair shops; I see them as entrepreneurs working just as hard as we are in an ever-changing and challenging industry. I urge independent repairers to reach out and support each other or, better still, reach out to the Fix Auto team and explore the opportunity to experience first-hand what it’s like to have the support of a strong network and a global partner for your business. After more than 50 years, we thought we had all the answers – turns out we didn’t. Since becoming a Fix Auto franchisee, we are so much better prepared than ever before.”



The Fix Auto Sunshine crew.