



Women in Business: Keran Wicks from Network Video

September 29, 2009 by [Deborah Robinson](#)



Keran Wicks (pictured) is the founder and Managing Director of The Network Group, a leading player in Australia's \$1 billion home entertainment industry. As the only woman in the world to run a movie rental group, Keran has spoken at international industry conferences; her unique perspectives and strong work ethic have made her a respected member of the Australian business community.

Without her vision and drive, the Australian home entertainment industry would be vastly different to what it is today. Keran played a vital role in the successful case brought against Warner Bros in the Australian Federal Court in 2001 that stopped two-tier DVD pricing, and has been an active board member of the Australian Video Rental Retailers Association (AVRRA) since 1998.

In regards to the 2001 Federal Court case, Keran Wicks told Australian Women Online, "When DVD first came out the studio decided to adopt a rental model rather than a retail model. When we had VHS, rental stores would pay two or three times the cost because there was a window between when a movie was released for rental and when it was released for retail."

"When DVD was launched suppliers decided to adopt a retail model and make DVDs available to everybody at the same time. But Warner decided there was a lot of money they would be losing from rental stores because of the drop in price, so in essence, Warner wanted to charge rental stores double the price just because we rented them. We [AVRRA] took exception to that because there was absolutely no difference in the product. So we took Warner to court and we won."

Not bad work for a lady who left school at the tender age of 13. "I don't have any formally diagnosed learning difficulties. But I clearly learn by doing things and experiencing things, rather than reading about them," said Keran. "In the days when I was at school there was only one way to learn and there wasn't the understanding of different learning styles that they have now."

A lack of formal education certainly hasn't held her back from achieving success in business. After leaving school, Keran reached management levels in the fashion industry in only a few years.

Seeking new challenges, she then began work in the movie rental business; there she learned how the industry operated and saw an opportunity to strike out on her own. Keran created her own wholesale business, selling movies from the boot of her car.

A natural aptitude for business saw Keran's first enterprise thrive and she soon took over her own rental store, dubbed Little Monster Video, after her first son, Paul.

Keran's innovative retail and marketing strategies were a key factor in the success of Little Monster, and the store's turnover increased nearly 900% over the first two years.

"I bought a run down video store and built it into a very success store," said Keran Wicks. "But just down the road from me was a Movieland store and they were able to purchase stock at half the price that I was paying, even though I was buying twice as much. Movieland was the first group in Australia to adopt a franchising business model. I spoke to them about joining Movieland but I already knew everything about running a movie rental store and didn't need the help of a franchise. I also wanted more flexibility in my business and didn't want to put my business in the hands of somebody else. So I decided to start my own group."

Tackling this challenge head-on, in October 1993, Keran launched Network Video. Network's unique business structure meant that members had more buying power without sacrificing autonomy. Keran's initiative paid off; within a year, Network Video membership had grown from 12 to 100.

"It was clearly a business model that was right for the industry at the time. Retailers were needing to find a better way for their purchasing and their marketing to be competitive in an industry that was starting to rationalise and become a lot more professional. The Network model suited those retailers who wanted more control over their business," said Keran.

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"If you go into any of the franchise outlets, it's hard to tell them apart. Whereas our stores are very unique. Each one is very different because it has the personality of the owner and they're not restricted. Our stores are designed to suit the needs of the local community and reflect the owner. Network is a licensing and marketing group so in essence we do almost the exactly the same thing as franchising without a contract that restricts everybody and the exorbitant costs that can be associated with a franchise."

The second-largest rental group in Australia, Network now has over 350 members under its umbrella. Under Keran's stewardship, The Network Group has grown beyond just a movie rental business. Since 1993, Network has expanded into retail and business support through such enterprises as [Done Dirt Cheap DVD](#), Network's online retail outlet; [MyVideoStore](#), an online information portal for all retail and rental stores; and developed a presence in online Video-On-Demand services. Keran's forward-thinking attitude means that The Network Group is a leader in retail and rental technology, keeping ahead of the curve.

With a strong personal interest in technology, Keran embraces new technologies and applies them to her business. Thanks to its unique IT systems and innovative approach, Network is a recognised industry leader in IT infrastructure.

"I honestly believe that in running a business you need to be able to do everything, or at least have an understanding of everything even if you can't do it yourself," said Keran.

She is as passionate about life as she is about work. Keran is a movie aficionado, Keran's favourite movies are *9½ Weeks*; *A Beautiful Mind*; and *Dead Poets Society*. She is also a soccer fanatic (or a Chelsea fanatic, more accurately) and a car enthusiast. When she turned 40, Keran bought a sporty convertible which she still owns. The mother of two boys also took up kick boxing and at 49 years of age, Keran is still dedicated to health and fitness, training several times a week.

Today Keran Wicks lives in Melbourne with her youngest son, Chris, and her White German Shepherd, Honey.

For more information about the Network Group visit the website www.networkvideo.com.au

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