



Measured approach to GFC pays dividends for AOL

**ALEXANDRA
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AUSTRALIAN Outdoor Living managing director Colin Kuchel saw the global financial crisis as a time to "clam up or expand".

He chose measured growth for the company he founded in Adelaide in 2005. Since then, the business - which manufactures cafe blinds and sells a range of outdoor products such as verandas and artificial lawn - has achieved turnover of \$35 million and stores in four states. AOL employs 55 people in South Australia and 85 nationally.

"When the GFC and the doom and gloom first came about I looked at it and thought 'I have two options, I can clam up or expand,'" he said. "We increased our advertising and increased our profile knowing that maybe the homeowner is more conducive to maintaining and improving their home, as opposed to buying, selling and upgrading."

Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that in the the three months to June last year, \$98.2 million in alterations and additions were made to residential buildings in SA.

Mr Kuchel said AOL was committed to selling only Australian-made products, which included the cafe blinds it manufactured from its headquarters at Royal Park.

After almost five years of strong growth, the next 12 months would be about consolidation. "Our next step is about practice, policy, occupational health and safety, and those sorts of things," he said. "Our next plan (products) is outdoor kitchens and then the next move from there is the full backyard makeover."



SMART THINKING: Australian Outdoor Living MD Colin Kuchel.

Picture: CHRIS MANGAN

MEASURED APPROACH TO GFC PAYS DIVIDENDS FOR AOL - By Alexandra Economou
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