

SMEAA Member Profile: *Deanna Varga*

**Who:** Deanna Varga  
**Business Owner:** Deanna Varga  
**What:** Revenue generation and marketing consultancy business in the tourism and business events sectors  
**Where:** Sydney  
**Operating Since:** August 2011

**SMEAA: Tell us a little about your business.**

**Deanna Varga:** A sole trader that established a consultancy business in August last year following three years within hotels and a 16-year career in tourism and hospitality.

- Multiple clients at any one time.
- Work with clients on strategies and revenue generation opportunities to grow their business, or components of it.
- Primarily relates to sales and marketing departments within tourism, business events (conferences, incentives, meetings) or social events (weddings).

Currently working with SMEs across the arts, major events, business events and tourism (leisure) sectors.

**SMEAA: What motivated you to start your own business?**

**DV:** I needed some perspective on life and what's really important.

**SMEAA: How has your business evolved since its inception?**

**DV:** We started with an eight-week contract with the Sydney Royal Easter Show, which has been ongoing for 10 months. The business has evolved through word of mouth and through taking initiatives to network (such as the SMEAA); we developed a basic website through tools specifically designed for small business by MYOB/Google; sought advice and support from colleagues with small consultancy businesses, and have found LinkedIn to be a useful tool on a number of levels. Attendance at specific industry tradeshows has been vital to keeping networks current and getting the availability message out there. There is also a strong network of consultants – we recommend each other when we cannot take on new projects. I have received new clients and business growth as a result of these referrals.

**SMEAA: How many staff do you currently employ?**

**DV:** Myself, plus I employ a consultant on an ad hoc basis.

**SMEAA: Who are your clients and where are they mostly based?**

**DV:** Currently with government departments and not-for-profits. Historically we have had a range of clients including:

- SMEs: Australian Cycling Holidays and Splash Public Relations/Function Tracker.
- Medium enterprises/not-for-profit: Royal Agricultural Society of NSW/Sydney Royal Easter Show
- Government clients: The Art Gallery of NSW, Historic Houses Trust of NSW and Tourism Australia.

They are all based in Sydney, however the work for Tourism Australia has been conducted in both Sydney and Perth due to the nature of the project.

**SMEAA: Tell us about some of the bigger successes your business has enjoyed?**

**DV:** A project with the Sydney Royal Easter Show was to review the financial viability of a number of new opportunities for the 2012 Show. I conducted the review and implemented working groups to facilitate these projects. Two of these projects were highly successful, generating significant revenue not previously earned to inject back into this not-for-profit organisation (and agriculture). These projects will now continue into the future and be developed and nurtured.

**SMEAA: Are you targeting new clients, or more so focusing on getting more business out of your existing customer base?**

**DV:** A bit of both. It's good to have some stability, so I like to allocate a couple of days a week to existing clients as this not only builds my

knowledge of their business but enables me to add more value to their organisation. This time is usually invested in longer term projects where the client does not have the resources or time to project manage the review, strategy or implementation. New clients are then used to top up with ad hoc short-term projects. As an example, I have done a tourism strategy for the AGNSW Picasso Exhibition and then the Tourism Strategy for the whole Gallery itself. Both short-term projects with clear completion dates.

**SMEAA: Many businesses are doing it tough at the moment; how's the outlook for your business?**

**DV:** Fantastic, with clear leads through my networks and a positive outlook on balancing the amount of work undertaken. It's a great time to be able to fulfil what government departments and companies might otherwise have to take on a full-time person for, and the funds that go with this investment. Because I offer a solution that can be short-term and more cost-effective than a full-time employee, it's a win-win.

**SMEAA: Do you have a business motto or any business advice you'd like to pass on to fellow small business owners?**

**DV:** Know your skills, what you are looking for and your strengths. Hold strong to that and don't try and be everything to everyone. Success is built on a focus – whether it's writing a strategy or keeping to the end goal. I also had to learn to know my value in the market place. We are often quick to reduce our rates, but it's important to understand your value and hold to it. That's your brand and what you bring to a client.

**SMEAA: When did you join the SME Association of Australia (SMEAA) and why did you decide to join?**

**DV:** I joined soon after the launch [October 2011] because I have known [SMEAA CEO] Caroline Hong for many years and it was a very reasonable fee for a small business, with what seemed like great benefits.

**SMEAA: What business challenges have you faced and how have you overcome them?**

**DV:** The challenges are about securing the next client – and with a project of interest. Or if a longer term contract is not assured, it's finding the next client to fill the gap. It's always difficult to sell yourself – even as a salesperson. It's also a challenge and important to find work that you are interested or engaged in. I know what my skills are and what I enjoy doing, so although it's hard to say no to work – it's really learning that sometimes it's okay to do so. Overcoming these? Positive outlook, looking forward, getting out there and asking for the business. You've got to ask, or you just don't get it. And you have to ask for the business you want, not take on board work just because it's work. In the long run, that won't do you or the business any good.

**SMEAA: What benefits have you and your business enjoyed from joining the SMEAA?**

**DV:** I went to the launch/Exhibition at ATP. It was a good networking event and a good start. I haven't made it to the other events due to working to deadlines (which, as one person in a business, is always a challenge) or conflicting events on the same nights. But I would very much like to attend, they look like great nights.

**SMEAA: Will you be renewing your SMEAA membership?**

**DV:** I have every intention of doing so.

**SMEAA: What would you say to other small business owners who are considering becoming a member of the SME Association of Australia?**

**DV:** I have already referred two or three people to the SMEAA. It's more affordable than most associations and has some great opportunities to expose your business and yourself. But like any membership, you only get out of it what you put in. ■■

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