

Factory focus key to top

In a bid to lead New Zealand's kitchen industry, Pridex has sold its retail stores to concentrate on extending its franchise.

Changes have been happening behind the scenes at Pridex Kitchens.

Steve Channing-Pearce is no longer running the showroom.

He has stepped back from retail and he now runs the Palmerston North factory only.

The message remains familiar, however.

Pridex aims to lead the New Zealand kitchen industry, and Mr Channing-Pearce seems as ambitious as ever.

It was that ambition that impressed the judging panel of the Manawatu Business Awards last year.

Pridex was the supreme winner. Lead awards judge James Lockhart said at the time that the company had experienced spectacular growth and its "aspirations are fascinating".

However, Pridex had a false start in its expansion plans when it tried to acquire Christchurch-based Fox Kitchens.

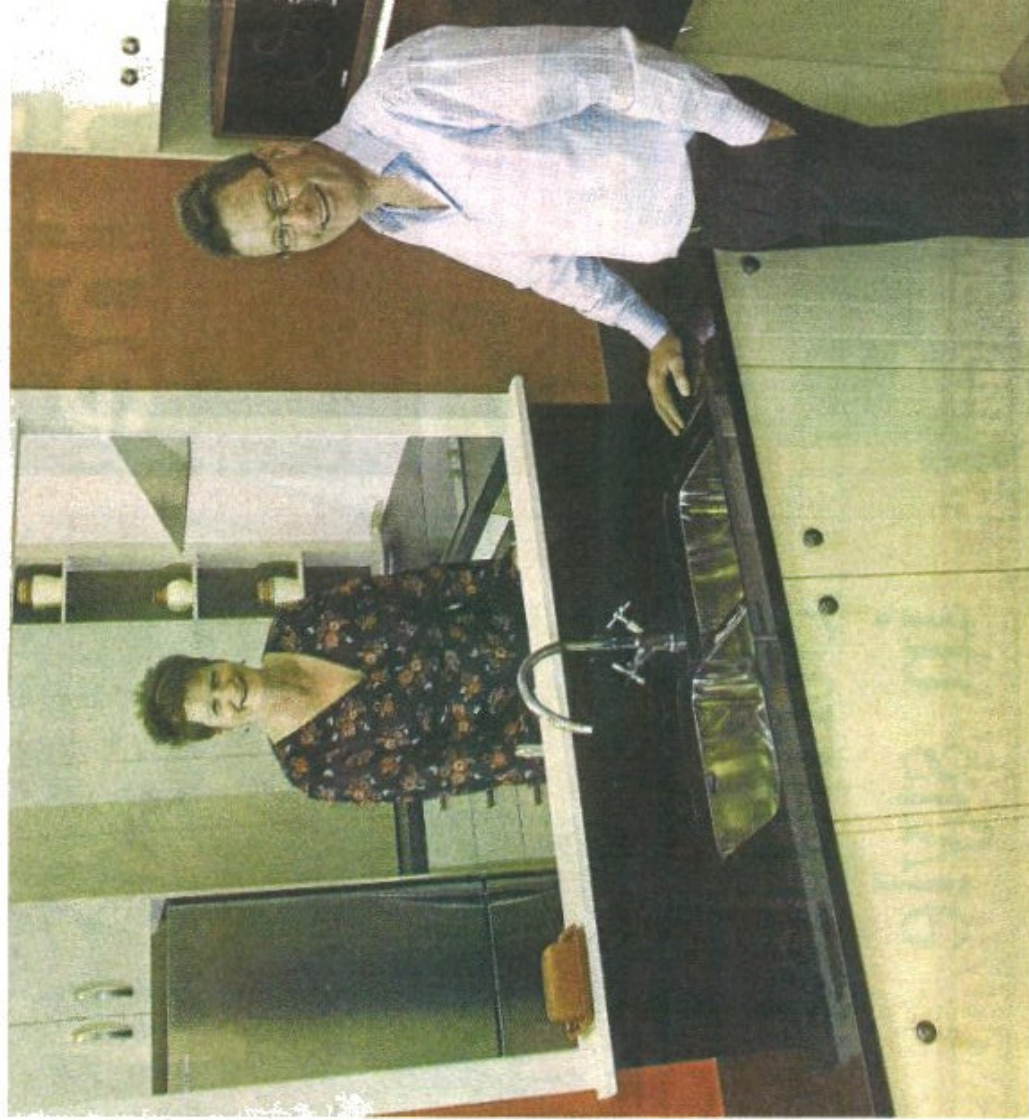
That turned into a court battle that Fox lost comprehensively this year.

Pridex has since re-evaluated. "If we want to lead the New Zealand kitchen market, we have to change the way we do things," Mr Channing-Pearce says.

He says running a factory and retail outlets didn't really work.

Before this month, Pridex had two independent outlets and another two that it owned.

"The two we owned weren't performing as well," Mr Channing-Pearce says. Independent franchises were the way to go, it was decided.



Pridex Kitchens Palmerston North shop owner Rosie Davey-Hicks and factory manager Steve Channing-Pearce in a showroom. Picture: Warwick Smith

So, Pridex sold its Auckland and Palmerston North retail operations. The new owner of the Palmerston North store is Rosie Davey-Hicks, previously a customer.

In fact, Ms Davey-Hicks has installed five kitchens in the various houses she has lived, so she's familiar with what customers look for.

"The kitchen is the heart of the home," she says.

"We spend a lot of time in there, whether we like it or not."

It's better to like it, of course, so people should be prepared to invest in that particular room, she says.

Ms Davey-Hicks' background is in accounting. But she loves cooking.

"I've just got my feet under the table. It's a steep learning curve, exciting, a great challenge," she says.

Pridex has been designing, manufacturing, selling and installing kitchens since 1982.

Since 2004 the company has quadrupled its turnover and doubled its staff.

It has invested more than \$1 million in plant and equipment in the past four years.

Separating manufacturing from retail avoids the problem of employing two kinds of staff or having employees' focus divided,

Mr Channing-Pearce says.

Pridex has set up a new manufacturer in the South Island.

There are now three franchises in the South Island and four in the

North Island. "We plan to go to 18 in the next year," Mr Channing-Pearce says.

"In trying to do that, we didn't particularly want our own

franchises." He is not greatly concerned about the global financial crisis because it tends to put cowboy operators out of business, he says.