

As the nation gets hooked on the new series of *The Celebrity Apprentice*, Mark Bouris took time out from filming to speak to editor JEN BISHOP about the show and small business in Australia.

BOURIS ON BUSINESS

By the time you read this, the first series of Australia's *The Celebrity Apprentice* should be about halfway through and love it or hate it, I'd put money on the fact it will have caused a stir or two in the media. Mark Bouris is the Aussie entrepreneur who gets to say: "you're fired!" The self-made multi-millionaire, who heads up wealth management company Yellow Brick Road, will be making sure his business leverages maximum exposure off the back of the show.

Following a successful non-celebrity version of the show in 2009, it was Bouris' idea to bring the celebrity version, which was huge in the States, to these shores. The celebrities taking part include Miss Universe Australia 2010 Jesinta Campbell; former AFL players Warrick

Capper and Shane Crawford; former NRL player Wendell Sailor; model Dider Cohen; former *So You Think You Can Dance Australia* judge Jason Coleman; controversial politician Pauline Hanson; musician Deni Hines; former swimmer Lisa Curry Kenny; comedian Julia Morris; celebrity publicist Max Markson and *The Block* winner Polly Porter. The winning celebrity will collect \$100,000 for charity.

It's been a busy and successful year for Bouris, who listed Yellow Brick Road on the

Australian Stock Exchange in June. The business now has 75 licensees all over the country with ambitious plans for further growth. The Nine Network (which airs *Celebrity Apprentice*) also bought a 19.9 percent stake in Yellow Brick Road this year.

"We're right on track with where we wanted to be with the business," says the ever-confident Bouris. "We're aiming for 125 branches by the end of the financial year. There's a huge pipeline there already. It's quite a small industry we're in and now everyone's starting to talk about us. They're seeing the branches and word is getting around. We're still dealing with enquiries off the back of the first series of *The Apprentice* so we're anticipating massive interest after this series. Since listing on the Stock Exchange we're equipped to deal with that. We've got a lot more money in the bank and we have the infrastructure in place. That's been the main difference to the business."

Listing the business took a long time and was difficult, admits Bouris. "We had to do a takeover of another company first and push our business into it. We raised the money and not many people have raised money this year. We had to be listed for *The Celebrity Apprentice* to happen, it was all part of the plan." He insists the business doesn't feel any different. "It's nice and safe and there's plenty of money in the bank. We got our listing just before the economy got wobbly out there."

Andrew Morello, the young entrepreneur who won the 2009 series of *The Apprentice* is still Yellow Brick Road's business development manager. "I do enjoy being a mentor to young business people but it's not just me, there are other people here who play a key part in that," says Bouris. They're doing something right as another two

contestants from that series are also working for him now.

Bouris says he really pushed for Australia to get a celebrity version of the reality show. "It took a year and a lot of patience to get it there. The show needed a refresh and it was hugely successful in the States. I thought it would work here and was a good

way to build on the momentum from the last one."

There's no hiding the fact that promoting Yellow Brick Road via the show is a priority. "We have a say in every single thing," says Bouris. "We're all over it, that was part of the deal." The famous boardroom set even has Yellow Brick Road branding. "It's really important to us how the brand is portrayed. We learnt a lot from the first series and anything we missed last time, we've made sure we've made amends." When we spoke, Bouris was in the middle of a grueling six-week filming schedule which saw him on set about four days a week. "Of course I'm having to work

a lot of extra hours but I know it's not going to last forever. And it's not just me, I have almost 200 staff now."

Yellow Brick Road's advisors provide holistic financial advice, management, execution and administration services, and related professional services in the areas of taxation, accounting, estate planning, insurance and finance broking. Next year they'll be really focusing on the small to medium business market and Bouris is passionate about the contribution of these people to the economy.

"There are 3.5 million small business owners in this country employing 60 percent of the population. They're completely underserved. People don't know how to do things like prepare their business for sale or leave it to their kids. Small business owners deserve a hand. They're the engine of this economy and the banks just try and charge them more money.

"People see business owners as whingers but these people work until they're old and they don't draw on the welfare system. They're paying people's super, they're gems to this country. The Government should put a statue up for them! If we didn't have small business owners, 8.5 million people wouldn't have super or a job."

To capitalise on the show, there'll be a concerted marketing effort to get the Yellow Brick Road brand more out there next year. And hopefully people will finally stop referring to Bouris as that guy from Wizard Home Loans. Oh, whoops... **DB**

"SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS ARE PAYING PEOPLE'S SUPER, THEY'RE GEMS TO THIS COUNTRY. THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD PUT UP A STATUE TO THEM!"