

## Clicks, not bricks, for new e-tailers

31 January 2006

**If you are opening a shop, why would you bother with bricks and mortar these days? We could be entering the age when any sensible entrepreneur goes straight online, says John McCrone.**

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But a new breed may simply bypass bricks and mortar.

Two young mums and long-time friends, Nicole Viljoen and Claire Price, have been an immediate hit with their online wedding gift registry, The Perfect Gift.

Mrs Viljoen knew all about shops. Her father ran an antiques business in Auckland. And at 17 she was tempted by the idea of opening her own small store.

"There was a gift shop premises for sale. But I did a business plan and the figures just didn't add up," she says.

Inspiration struck after she and Mrs Price had been to 20-odd weddings in a few years, including their own.

They came across every variation of a wedding registry imaginable, from hastily faxed scrawls to big department store lists that left them wondering which floor they might find a "heart vase" on.

So on Valentine's Day 2004 the pair went live with their online registry. Mrs Viljoen had mortgaged her Napier home as no other easy finance seemed available for an Internet retailing venture.

Last year the business grew 500 per cent, she says. And there is no telling where it could end up.

What has surprised them is the way the business has flipped from the usual customer base.

Mrs Viljoen says they expected they would have New Zealanders buying for New Zealanders.

Instead, 80 per cent of their business is from people in other countries who cannot get to a wedding in person.

"A lot of the brides might have partners from overseas. All their relatives will want to buy something that they can browse online then have gift-wrapped and delivered over here," Mrs Viljoen says.

Now that it has happened, this reverse kind of export trade seems completely logical.

And The Perfect Gift is exploiting it by branching out into gifts for any kind of occasion, such as birthdays, anniversaries and Christmas.

It might be said that Mrs Viljoen and Mrs Price simply struck lucky – just as Kia Kaha did with Campbell's win. But the stories illustrate the kind of retailing that works on the Internet.

Marketing experts say the Internet is scalefree because it supports any – and indeed all – scales of online business.

The big successes will be really big. However, they will be correspondingly few in number. After all, every town needs a flagship book store. But does the Net actually need more than one Amazon?