

06 / 08 / 2014

Elite Sound & Lighting Celebrates 20 Years

Canberra, Australia based Elite Sound & Lighting celebrates 20 years at the forefront of the sound, lighting and video technology rentals business, a success based on offering the latest and most appropriate technologies and a superlative service to its clients.

The company has been built on foresight, an intense work ethic and some serious teamwork. Whilst it might sound like a cliché, founder Darren Russell is the first person to say that 'it's all about the people' and some very special relationships that he's built up over the years.

He and his wife Keri are right at the core of this human equation, and Darren founded the company in 1994, wanting to offer the very best service and standards of excellence in the world of PA and lighting rental.

Elite now owns around 300 Robe moving lights, it has just invested in a new arena sized d&b J-Series line array audio system and has also purchased a new warehouse and office complex in Hume, Canberra.

Additionally, Elite has just announced a new collaboration with US audio rental specialists Eighth Day Sound which is designed to offer support, resources and local expertise to Eighth Day clients engaged on shows and events in Australia, while also providing Elite Sound and Lighting with additional capacity.

That's quite a way to celebrate 20 years!

Elite currently has 13 full time employees and a wider pool of 'permanent casuals' and regular freelancers, all of whom are instrumental in maintaining the buzz and reputation of the company. Previous to founding Elite, Darren worked for about 10 years in the 'industry' doing a whole range of things, from local and touring crew work to music retail and some production, which made him realise there was a gap in the market for very good, high quality small-to-medium packaged systems of PA and Lights! So he also set himself up with a basic system, a few lights, a truck and plenty of ideas and ambitions about doing things properly - initially as a side project!

As the 'side project' took off, the logical progression was for Darren to go full time with Elite Sound & Lighting, and as this happened the business started to grow surely and steadily. Initially he undertook a lot of touring work and within the first few years realised that a smart move would be to broaden the scope of the company's work and have a healthy balance of projects and clients in different sectors ... rather than becoming known as a specialist in one discipline.

This happened over a number of years. Elite now has a string of high-profile and popular live performance and corporate venues for which they are the technical service provider, they still do

tours, lots of local shows, corporate events and presentations, EDM parties, etc. as well as dry hires, sales and installations. In addition to the equipment, Elite can provide design services, and 12 years ago started investing in video, pre-empting the integration and crossover with lighting that has created the world of 'live visuals'.

Elite's clients can now come to one place and get everything they need for a show or event including dressing and venue theming as well as complete event management, a division of the company run by Darren's wife, Keri.

Being ideally located in the ACT also brings plenty of opportunities for supplying local and national government projects, plus a geographical advantage with less competition at the top levels by being away from the rough-and-tumble of more commercial Sydney.

One of the USP's helping to fuel Elite's development has been to focus on excellent customer service, really going 'the extra mile' for clients and providing the best quality and most innovative kit for their projects.

Elite Sound & Light's working relationship with Robe started around four years ago when Robe launched the ROBIN series and specifically, the ROBIN LEDWash 600 - which is universally acknowledged as the first and still the best luminaire in its class.

"At that point we were looking for a market leading brand," explains Darren, "And that is certainly what we found".

The first purchase was of LEDWash 600s and ROBIN 600E Spots. This was shortly followed by MMX Spots, then LEDBeam 100s and most recently, Pointes as the Robe elements of the hire stock have increased rapidly in a short time.

They were the first company in Australia to take delivery of Robe's best selling Pointe luminaire last year. This was quickly followed by a second batch, and they are just about to place an order for 16 more Pointes all to keep pace with demand.

"We can't get enough of them," Darren declares. "We have also just ordered 16 LEDBeam 1000 launched at Prolight+Sound, Frankfurt this year, in our view, another game changing fixture from Robe". All the Robe fixtures have been supplied to Elite by Robe's very proactive Australian distributor, The ULA Group - a relationship that stretches right back to before Darren first launched the company. "It's like being part of a family," he comments about ULA and particularly its MD, the charismatic Cuono Biviano. "We both know each other very well and are always there for one another," he says of the association, adding that the levels of service from ULA are "Amazing".

Darren first visited the Robe factory in Valmez, CZ, three years ago, He was hugely impressed and admits it "ticked a lot of boxes" in his mind about the brand once he could see first-hand the detail and meticulousness of the set up. He realised at this point why Robe's products are so reliable and well-engineered.

The other thing that struck him about the factory was "The fantastic vibe of the staff - they are all really passionate about their work", he observes - something he's never experienced when visiting any other international manufacturer.

He also values the fact that Robe's products are genuinely made in Europe and all the processes are completed in-house.

Now Elite has made the investment in Robe, as the profile of the brand and their recognition for innovation rises, he is also getting many positive reactions from lighting designers. There have been a few LDs recently whose spec has been of a competitor brand, and when Elite has come back saying they are a Robe house ... the reaction has been 'Great - actually we'd rather use Robe!'

He's also finding a lot of mixed specs and cross-hire potential with other companies who are being asked for Robe, all of it ultimately reinforcing the decision he took to focus on one moving light brand.

"People are very happy to accept Robe, and with the LEDWash series, MMX Spots, LEDBeam 100s and now the Pointes ... we can satisfy pretty much every requirement".

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