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PREMIER'S SUSTAINABILITY EXCELLENCE AWARD: INSTYLE CONTRACT TEXTILES

AT A company conference six years ago, the staff at Instyle sat down with their bosses and told them the direction in which they would like the company to head.

Of course they wanted it to grow financially but they also wanted Instyle to become a leader in the field of environmental sustainability. The bosses took notice and in just five years the textile design, wholesale and contract manufacturer has done just that. The small, privately owned company this year beat some of the largest conglomerates in Australia to win the Premier's Sustainability Excellence Award. It also won the Small Business Sustainability Award in the commercial category and the industry environmental sustainability gong.

Instyle has a staff of 47 and specialises in the design, marketing and distribution of commercial interior furnishing textiles for offices, health care, hospitality and transport.

Since that round-table discussion six years ago, the company has made substantial efforts to integrate sustainable practices throughout all aspects of its operation, from management, product design, warehouse operations and transport.

"The first thing we did was an internal audit on our operations," Tracy Mak, Instyle environment manager, says. "We introduced recyclable packaging for our products because we found that 80 per cent of our waste was from transport packaging. We used to wrap it in bright blue plastic that no recycling company would take, so we

changed to a material that is 100 per cent recyclable. We introduced new software to decrease our paper use and we are very conscious not to print too many brochures. We design things so when they get printed it is on a non-coloured background using vegetable inks."

With the internal machinations

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of the company on the right track, Instyle turned its attention to its products, addressing the entire life cycle from fibre sourcing, safety of chemicals, energy and water, recycling and social responsibility.

It developed a sustainable textile collection – LIFE Textiles – that utilises Australian eco wool and certified organic wool.

Mak says Instyle is now also conscious of how the fibres it

selects are treated with chemicals and the company is developing screen textiles made from corn fibre, which is a renewable resource and 100 per cent compostable.

"Sometimes new fibres have come on the market and are sold for their environmental properties but we don't like to take things at face value," Mak says. "We do our own research. Things like soy-based textiles, for example, are treated with chemicals that cannot be broken down, as is bamboo – so we won't use those."

To reduce its greenhouse-gas emissions from the company's car fleet, 40 trees have been planted to offset 90 tonnes of carbon-dioxide emissions generated in 2006-07.

One of the most significant achievements of Instyle has been in its push for and development of a sustainable textile standard that will become the most stringent environmental textile standard internationally.

"The standard will change the industry by defining exactly what is environmental sustainability," Mak says.

Judge Alex Walker says one of the most impressive aspects of Instyle's environmental program is the company's commitment over a long period of time. "They have been performing strongly for a good five years and all aspects of their environmental plan are integrated.

"Instyle has a whole-of-lifestyle approach and their public-sustainability reporting is on par with much bigger companies. They are working within their industry to influence market practices, as well as achieving commercial sustainability," Walker says.

