

Cook returns to boost business structure

■ Emily Morgan

FOURTEEN years after establishing ineedhits.com, and six years after becoming non-executive chairman, Clay Cook has returned as chief executive of the online marketing business.

A *WA Business News* 40under40 award winner, Mr Cook has taken over the role from Warren Duff.

He has spent the past six years building online parenting site Minti with his wife, business partner and fellow 40under40 winner Rachel Cook.

Ms Cook has taken charge of Minti, allowing Mr Cook to focus on ineedhits.com.

"The closer I got the more excited I got about the future of the company again," Mr Cook said.

He said that moving away from the chief executive role six years ago was a decision based on strategy as well as lifestyle choice.

Mr Cook was on the brink of burnout after adapting the business to significant market changes in a space he had been dominating until the year prior.

"In 2003 one of the big growth areas in search engine marketing was a product called paid inclusion



and we were probably one of three companies worldwide who ... were leading the charge there.

"Google came along, brought out a new product in search engine marketing, which basically just grew extraordinarily and the paid inclusion market collapsed."

Mr Cook said the changes to the market and drop in revenue helped to expose the internal issues within the business.

"About 50 per cent of our revenue dried up in a very short space of time and we had scaled up in people and systems, we had to readjust rather rapidly," he said.

He then brought in chief executive Jackie Shervington, who had the required expertise to make the internal human resource changes necessary for rebuilding the structures of the company.

"It was about rebuilding from the foundations, in regards to our structure, our procedures, our people and also our technology," he said.

He still draws on these experiences to ensure the structure of the business remains sound.

"We have learnt a lot, we have diversified in our partnerships and products and our core services. As a business and as entrepreneurs we have matured a lot," Mr Cook said.

"Previously we had one or two partnerships which contributed probably over 50 per cent of our revenue and profit and now we service 5,000 customers every month and we have a couple of hundred partners which deliver 40 per cent of our business.

"The technology now as well as the management structure and the people involved makes the company far stronger than it's ever been. We are in this sweet spot now, where we are ready for another growth phase and that is where my experience comes in handy."

Mr Cook told *WA Business News* he has never been too far away, sitting on the advisory board of the ineedhits.com and watching over the changes made to the business since his departure.

Nominations officially open!
www.40under40.com.au



BACK ON BOARD: Clay Cook has returned as chief executive of ineedhits.com, the online marketing business he founded in 1996. Photo: Tim van Bronswijk