

[Anne Fulwood](#)

Moving with the times

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Anne Fulwood

It was a serendipitous moment over the kitchen table – the Crowley family started dinner and ended up with a new business structure.

Chrissie Crowley had spent 18 years building her A-Locate Global Relocation business from her Sydney home and admits she had never considered a succession plan. Son Hugh was at a career crossroads. A bachelor of agricultural economics who had worked with The Surf Travel Company and had a stint in margin loans with Macquarie Group, he was not attracted to corporate life.

But he could see an opportunity to consolidate his mother's A-Locate networks, corporate knowledge and goodwill into what he calls a "more quantifiable and tangible" business.

"I suddenly realised this was a viable option and together we could shape the business for the future," says his mother.

That was two years ago and virtually on the spot Hugh was appointed national development manager.

"He is on a small salary with a remit to corporatise A-Locate and to participate in any revaluation of the business," Chrissie Crowley says.

"I was carrying a lot of the knowledge around in my head," she says with characteristic insouciance, which betrays a well-honed nose for business. "He can apply his younger Gen Y skills to build systems, databases and processes into an entity that could either be sold or be transferable to a third party in the future. It seemed a waste if we could not capitalise on what I have built."

Crowley's business had been a one-stop shop to get quotes from, and connect clients to, a host of service providers to ease the stress of a big inter-city move.

The shared vision is for A-Locate to underpin a host of diversified enterprises including property, social networking and database management.

The first job was to upgrade the website into a more interactive portal managed by Hugh. Crowley says her first site was so basic it was hacked. Her personal trainer introduced her to a website marketer who used Turtle Technology and for about \$5000, the new site launched 18 months ago. "We have had more individual inquiries which have all converted to relocation jobs," says Crowley. "The site paid for itself in the first week."

Earnings per move can range from \$2000 to \$8000, from the initial connection to completion, Crowley says. "Prices scale up from single people through to large families with dogs and cats.

"More services such as school introductions, visa services, rental furniture, and property insights incur greater costs."

Crowley says her son's website expertise means the business can offer more streamlined web-based processes and documentation – for example the pre-arrival PDF sent to clients with all the frequently asked questions she used to answer in person.

There is an eight-stage A-Locate journey, where clients can click through to an orientation kit for Australia, or to accommodation and education options, even to club memberships.

Suppliers to A-Locate include visa agent Amanda Tinner, from Visa Executive in Melbourne. Furniture is rented from Valiant Hire; Moving Strategies and Trans-International quote for removals, and for serviced apartments they work with Fraser Suites and Milsons Executive, to name a few.

Over 20 years about 15,000 people have been relocated or made connections via A-Locate. Crowley came to relocation management in much the same way as she arrived at her succession plan. Opportunity knocked and it seemed a good idea at the time.



Photo: Nic Walker

A physical education teacher from Adelaide who married banker Michael and has lived in Sydney ever since, Crowley saw an advertisement for a part-time relocation consultant and applied, setting aside her previous plan to do a sports management degree.

A few years later she launched her own company. Her first corporate client was McKinsey, which remains in a list of some 30 multinationals. These days A-Locate can tap into a pool of about 20 consultants, who cover the major capital cities and regional areas.

All women, they work from their own homes and earn, on average, \$800 per assignment, which can take from three days to two weeks.

Turnover has increased by about 25 per cent a year since Hugh joined, reaching a six-figure amount to the end of the 2012 financial year. The company averages about 15 to 20 moves a month.

"Hugh is one of the few Gen Ys working in relocation," Crowley says. "Our clientele is becoming younger and a lot of the HR and mobility co-ordinators in big firms are around his age and want to talk to him."

A new corporate trend since the global financial crisis, observes Crowley, has been a rise in the number of single people, rather than families, on the move as it is more cost-effective.

"It can cost over \$150,000 to relocate a family," she says.

As well, the federal government stopped the tax-effective living away from home allowance for 457 visa holders in October 2012, which Crowley says has had a big impact on the executive rental market and is discouraging foreign talent from coming to Australia.

The Australian Financial Review



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