

# aboutlife's mission to make organics mainstream

aboutlife  
natural marketplace

**S**ydney's aboutlife natural marketplace opened its second outlet at Bondi Junction, in Sydney's eastern suburbs in June 2009. Aboutlife founders and sisters Jodie Stewart and Tammie Phillips, obtained the lease on the Macro Wholefoods Bondi Junction store from founder Pierce Cody before the chain was sold to Woolworths. The sisters came from hands-on hospitality and hotel marketing backgrounds and opened their first aboutlife store in 1996 at Rozelle. They added a catering arm to the business in 2000, and moved to a larger site where their current store is based in 2005.

According to Ms Stewart, the former Macro Wholefoods 500sqm store, located at the Woollahra end of Oxford Street, Bondi Junction, was Sydney's first-ever organic store that was a one-stop shop - not in the format of a typical health food store. Further to the acquisition aboutlife introduced their catering and café department to the store, while over 100 lines were added to their fresh food offering. The Bondi store today stocks around 8,000 lines. Ms Phillips says customers' suspicion that the store had been taken over by a large retail chain was a setback. "It took three months to get the message through by word of mouth and local promotions that we were independent. Customers clearly wanted the store to be privately owned," she says.

Competition is tougher at Bondi than at the Rozelle location. "Sales are growing every week and customers are responding to restocking with quality produce and dry groceries with an emphasis on organic wherever possible and fresh throughout the store," the owners said. Helping to make viable the stocking of fresh organic produce has been purchasing of produce for use in both stores' catering and café operations. Ms Stewart says organics is creeping into mainstream purchasing with consumers purchasing more organic products for their children and new consumers coming into the market. With this trend, aboutlife customers are putting, on average, about 15 organic lines into their weekly baskets.

Sales have grown by 14% in 2009 at aboutlife Rozelle, while Christmas sales were strong at Rozelle and encouraging at Bondi Junction. Lines were expanded at both stores last year due to new and existing customer demand and the availability of new products. The Rozelle offer was expanded around 30%



in late 2008 to 10-11,000 lines with a great range of fresh food, with the trend appearing to be people previously eating in restaurants now purchasing higher quality fresh foods to eat at home. "We've seen good weekend sales in products such as meats, sustainable fish and salads and customers have responded to the changes made at Rozelle, which is now more of a 'destination store'," the owners said.

In response to what has been described as a price 'barrier to consuming organic', Aboutlife is introducing an initiative to reach new customers. "In February we are launching a new category to our stores made up of 150 organic staple lines at best prices," Ms Phillips said. "We are working closely with our suppliers to deliver great value in this category. The category is focused specifically on organic and price - brand is not our focus. For example we will range 500ml organic olive oil at \$8.90. The price won't change, but the brand on offer may change throughout the year."

Like Rozelle, the Bondi Junction store has a strong natural feel and ambience, and is split into three sections: first café and catering; second fresh produce (fresh foods, chilled meats, breads and bulk foods); and

third, grocery, natural therapies, foods to go/ prepared meals and chilled foods/ dairy taking up the remaining half of the store.

Winning the New South Wales Organic Retailer of the Year award for 2009 for the Rozelle store, presented during Organic Week, came as "an unexpected and pleasant surprise" to the owners, helped by the store having to meet high standards and expectations from industry experts.

For more information visit:  
[www.aboutlife.com.au](http://www.aboutlife.com.au)

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