

Quick facts

- Fiji’s gross domestic product (GDP) projection for 2014 was revised by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) by half a per cent upward to 3.3 per cent<sup>6</sup>. The majority of this growth can be attributed to tourism - Fiji’s highest income-generating sector.
- With the steady increase in the number of tourists visiting Fiji, the construction industry has also expanded. The total value of construction -related activities in 2013 and 2014 has risen from FJ\$133.9 million to FJ\$138.2 million<sup>7</sup> (Fijian dollars). The projected value of construction activities in Fiji for 2015 is set at FJ\$140.1<sup>8</sup> million according to Fiji’s 2013 Budget.<sup>9</sup>
- In 2008, while they were still students at APTC, Abhinesh and Ravinesh Kumar registered their tiling company, Quality Tile Setters.

<sup>6</sup> [www.adb.org/countries/fiji/economy](http://www.adb.org/countries/fiji/economy)  
<sup>7</sup> *Approximately AU\$78.0 million to AU\$80.0 million*

- Following their graduation in 2009, Abhinesh and Ravinesh invited another graduate of the Certificate III Wall and Floor Tiling program, Rajnesh Kumar, to join them as a business partner.
- Quality Tile Setters now employs over 20 staff – all APTC graduates - on either a full-time or part-time basis.
- Quality Tile Setters now works for multimillion dollar projects such as the recent Westin Denarau Resort and Spa refurbishment, which is run by the parent company, Starwood Hotels.

<sup>8</sup> *Approximately AU\$81.8 million*  
<sup>9</sup> [www.fiji.gov.fj/getattachment/6e106d3d-2cb0-452f-8d39-dfc333f68af8/Download-2013-Budget-Supplement-\(pdf\).aspx](http://www.fiji.gov.fj/getattachment/6e106d3d-2cb0-452f-8d39-dfc333f68af8/Download-2013-Budget-Supplement-(pdf).aspx)



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Expanding small business  
with Entrepreneurial  
spirit and key skills





# Entrepreneurial spirit and key skills help a small business expand

*Brothers Abhinesh and Ravinesh Kumar have successfully used the skills they learnt at Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC) to run a thriving tiling company that is recognised across Fiji for its high standards and quality of work.*

Fiji has enjoyed consistent economic growth over the last five years. The country’s gross domestic product (GDP) projection for 2014 was revised by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) by half a per cent upward to 3.3 per cent<sup>1</sup>. The majority of this growth can be attributed to tourism - Fiji’s highest income-generating sector.

With the steady increase in the number of tourists visiting Fiji, the construction industry has also expanded. The total value of construction-related activities in 2013 and 2014 has risen from FJ\$133.9 million to FJ\$138.2 million<sup>2</sup> (Fijian dollars). The projected value of construction activities in Fiji for 2015 is set at FJ\$140.1<sup>3</sup> million according to Fiji’s 2013 Budget.<sup>4</sup>

This growth has lead to an increased demand for construction services from both local and multinational corporations, including large global hotel chains. More construction also requires more construction workers who are able to meet the industry standards that these companies expect.

To help fill this gap for more skilled workers, Abhinesh Kumar and his brother, Ravinesh Kumar, who both graduated from APTC in 2009 with a Certificate III in Wall and Floor Tiling, combined their skills and knowledge to expand their small tiling business into a thriving company.

Abhinesh was first to recognise that a growing construction industry would need qualified tilers. He was aware that the tilers who were working in the industry at that time were often unskilled and unfamiliar with working to international industry standards. Abhinesh clearly saw that there was a lot to be gained by studying at APTC and gaining a qualification.

In 2008, while they were still students at APTC, Abhinesh and Ravinesh registered their tiling business, Quality Tile Setters. With the money from their first contract and their savings, they were able to buy more tools. “Our first contract was only worth \$25, but the people were so impressed with the skills that we learnt from APTC that this led to more contracts,” says Abhinesh.

According to Neil Atkinson, APTC trainer in wall and floor tiling, Ravinesh excelled in the practical side of the course, while Abhinesh was always the entrepreneurial one who combined practical skills with his business flair to build their company. “Abhinesh is a fantastic communicator and was always a bit of an entrepreneur,” explains Neil. “And his brother Ravinesh is the exception tiler.”

According to Abhinesh, in addition to the technical skills he learnt at APTC, he also gained valuable time management skills and how to work with new technologies, in particular the latest tools of his trade.

The APTC Certificate III Wall and Floor Tiling is an Australian accredited qualification. The Australian wall and floor tiling industry has the advantage of being able to follow standards set by the Australian Tile Council (ATC). Qualified and licensed tilers have access to the ATC’s Tile Reference Manual to support them with their work.<sup>5</sup>

In Fiji and across the Pacific, there is currently no industry body that oversees the standard of tiling services provided by individual contractors. This lack of regulation also means that the quality of work, safety standards and timeliness of construction work are not guaranteed.

Neil recognises that one of the main areas lacking in the local tiling industry is apprenticeship programs, which are a fundamental component in trade training in Australia. Industry bodies such as the ATC and the Australian Master Tilers Association also regulate apprenticeships in the tiling industry.

Neil also believes that the confidence that employers across the Pacific have in APTC graduates is down to the fact that the training is aligned with their expectations and addresses the training gaps in the relevant industries.

“Employers approach us to hire our graduates or students for their jobs because they recognise the quality of training provided by APTC,” says Neil. “One of the most significant aspects of the training program that appeals to employers is the focus we have on occupational health and safety, which is now a growing area of concern in aligning local tiling standards with global standards.”

Following their graduation in 2009, Abhinesh and Ravinesh invited another graduate of the Certificate III Wall and Floor Tiling program, Rajnesh Kumar, to join them as a business partner. “Because Rajnesh also went to APTC, I recognised that he could bring his quality and unique skills to help our business grow,” says Abhinesh.

Quality Tile Setters has grown from three business partners, who also carried out all the work on the contracts, to employing 20 staff, all of whom are APTC graduates. “Out of these staff, 15 are full time and additional five, and sometimes more, are employed when we need them,” says Abhinesh.

Quality Tile Setters is now involved in multimillion dollar projects, including the recent Westin Denarau Resort and Spa refurbishment. It completed this work under the resort’s parent company, Starwood Hotels. Starwood Hotels is an international company that encompasses brands such as Sheraton and Westin. With these recognised global brands, maintaining the high standard of their hotels and resorts is essential to their business operations and services, as well as their reputation in the industry.

“One of our first major projects was the Westin refurbishment,” says Abhinesh. “We finished 173 rooms on time and exceeded the expectations of the client. This led to the Starwood Hotels management providing us with more tiling and waterproofing contracts at both the Westin and its other resorts such as the Sheraton Fiji Resort.”



Abhinesh Kumar at the 2012 National Sports Award with Fiji Sports Commission CEO, Peter Marzy.



Abhinesh displays some of his tiling work at the Sheraton Fiji Resort, Tokoriki Island.



Abhinesh with volunteer runners for his charity organisation, Jet Runners Nadi.

## Recognising the skills of APTC graduates

A significant aspect of the delivery of the APTC-ONOC Community Positive feedback from employers of APTC graduates has led to recognition across the Fijian tiling industry of the quality of APTC training.

Neil Atkinson, APTC trainer in the Certificate III in Wall and Floor Tiling, has noticed an increased focus on safety standards in workplaces across the Pacific, including those in Fiji. Given that occupational health and safety is a key competency in APTC training, this increase can be attributed in part to APTC graduates working in the industry.

APTC graduates are in great demand across the building industry, especially for large companies, such as those in the luxury resort and hotel industry where construction and quality standards cannot be compromised.

Abhinesh Kumar, founder and co-owner of Quality Tile Setters and APTC graduate, has capitalised on this demand by employing other APTC graduates in his business.

“I now have over 20 staff on either a full-time or part-time basis that have all graduated from APTC,” says Abhinesh.

As an entrepreneur, Abhinesh understands that maintaining consistency in service quality ensures that clients continue to provide his business with opportunities for larger projects.

“We now work on several large contracts for Fiji’s top resorts including the Tanoa Waterfront in Lautoka and other big resorts on Denarau and the outer islands,” says Abhinesh.

He has confidence in his employees’ ability to maintain the standard and quality of work that is significant to these large clients.

“We spent around \$10,000 on purchasing new tools and equipment from Australia so our workers are always using the most up-to-date equipment,” explains Abhinesh. “This also means that we are able to finish our jobs more efficiently and on time.”

He is also aware that having adequately trained workers ensures that equipment is used effectively and correctly and that safety standards are not compromised.

Abhinesh also utilises other skills he picked up during his APTC studies to help him effectively manage his business operations, including time management and procurement best practices. These skills ensure that he is independent when sourcing quotes for sub-contracted work, and that his quotations are consistent with the level of work required and standard of work expected.

## Giving back to the community

“One of the things I learnt from APTC and my trainer, aside from the technical skills, is the importance of giving back to the community,” says Abhinesh Kumar, founder and co-owner of Quality Tile Setters and APTC graduate.

Abhinesh’s brother, Ravinesh, and Rajnesh Kumar, both also APTC graduates, are the other partners in the business. “APTC has given so much to the Pacific. For many of us, we were not skilled and could never dream of the size of contracts that we now have and the confidence of employers in our work until now,” says Abhinesh.

Abhinesh is a strong believer in the flow-on impact that APTC can have at the community level. This belief has encouraged him to actively give back to his local community through his business.

As well as gaining his Certificate III in Wall and Floor Tiling at APTC, Abhinesh is also a graduate of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. In addition to the lucrative projects that they work on, including for large resort chains such as Starwood Hotels, Tanoa Hotels and luxury island resorts, the three graduates also share their APTC skills with unemployed and young people, who they employ on a casual basis when required by their large-scale contracts.

Quality Tile Setters, who also employ 20 APTC graduates, are committed to teaching their casual employees basic tiling skills and providing them with an opportunity to work in a trade and choose tiling as a career.

Quality Tile Setters is also the major sponsor of Jet Runners Club - a not-for-profit runners club based in Nadi that promotes the health and fitness of the community. The business contributes 2 per cent of its profits to related community-based projects.

Abhinesh, Ravinesh and Rajnesh also regularly carry out small tiling jobs for community churches and schools free of charge. “This not only promotes APTC and tiling as a career, but people remark at the standard of our work and this then leads to word-of-mouth recommendations to other bigger clients,” says Abhinesh.

“Large clients also see that we are trustworthy and community-oriented and this helps them believe more in us, on top of the fact that we are associated with APTC.”

<sup>1</sup> [www.adb.org/countries/fiji/economy](http://www.adb.org/countries/fiji/economy)

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<sup>5</sup> [www.austriantilecouncil.com.au/tiling-facts](http://www.austriantilecouncil.com.au/tiling-facts)