



It's been a whirlwind year for Australian Chris Belli. Intrigued by career and cultural opportunities in Indianapolis, he packed up his family and relocated to the city last summer.

AUSSIE TO INDY

City Proves Attractive to Career Changer

By **Symone C. Skrzycki**

Australian native Chris Belli knows how to make an entrance – and an unforgettable first impression.

A recent example, and perhaps the most life changing to date, was a cross-continent move from Melbourne to Indianapolis in 2016.

Belli joined Studio Science, a leading design and innovation consultancy, as director of business development in August. Company president Nathan Sinsabaugh instantly knew there was something special about him.

“When we first were introduced to him, it was through a video he’d made and put on YouTube,” Sinsabaugh recalls. “He taught himself how to use the video

tools and told his story of coming to the United States from Australia. Every other resume we got was a (traditional) resume. It was clear from the beginning that he took a different perspective and approach to things.

“What’s been awesome is to see him continue to do that here as he’s become part of the team. That’s important when you’ve got a bunch of designers who are kind of idealistic and perfectionists – and to have somebody come in that’s willing to say, ‘Let’s try things a little differently,’ or ‘Maybe it doesn’t have to be that kind of perfect.’ That’s really powerful as a team.”

Life in the Outback

Belli plops down in a colorful office chair, offering a greeting with a friendly – and thick – Australian accent. A quick look around his office reveals that sports isn’t the only passion in his life.

Gazing at a tall bookcase, he points to his three children’s photos and mementos.

“That’s the baby at the top,” Belli gestures. “That’s my little boy fishing on the left. And that’s (a picture) my oldest did.

“She was getting to school age and I thought, ‘If she starts school in Australia, it’s going to be very difficult to move her.’ So it was, ‘Make a decision now to go or put her in school in Australia and be locked into Australia.’ ”

At the same time, Belli’s heritage holds a special place in his heart.

“I was born in Australia,” he explains. “Dad was from Italy, straight off the boat as a four-year-old. Mom was born in Australia, but both of her parents were Italian. We had this interesting upbringing. It was a good mix (of cultures). My brother and I spoke Italian before we spoke English, but we spoke both languages.

“We grew up doing the whole Australian thing. We played cricket. We played Australian football.”

And there were the summers.

“Australian summers are awesome,” he observes wistfully. “As you could imagine, the beaches, cold beers, barbecues – you guys call them cookouts – and that type of stuff.”

He also yearns for one of life’s simple pleasures.

“I miss the coffee,” Belli declares. “The coffee out here isn’t very good.

There are a couple of really good coffee shops here in Indy, (but) I miss that a lot.”

His move to Indianapolis wasn't his first foray into the country. Itching to travel, he left Australia at age 18 for a job in Colorado.

“What a lot of Americans don't know is that (people in) foreign countries grow up on U.S. things: sitcoms, movies, basketball,” he comments. “I had posters of Michael Jordan on my wall as a kid. America always had this draw as a place I wanted to travel to and experience.”

Upon returning to Australia a few years later, he met his wife, Erica. She was an exchange student from Indiana University. Soon, an internship at the Louisville Sports Commission brought Belli to Kentucky. He majored in sports and recreation.

“Part of the commitment of the sports commission is to attract events that put bums in beds,” he emphasizes. “People need to eat at restaurants. People need to fill their cars up before they go out of town. We worked on the Ryder Cup. We worked to attract a Mike Tyson fight to Louisville. We also worked on all of the other smaller events that go along with promoting a city, such as a junior World Series of baseball or a volleyball tournament.”

At age 24, Belli got married and returned to Australia. But America would come calling once again.

Game changer

Belli's 13-year career in the sports industry covered areas such as international horse racing and Australian rules football. Eventually, he determined it was time for something different.

“I got to a point where I couldn't make the disconnect between professional – what was a job – and what was recreation,” he reflects. “While it was still enjoyable, a change is as good as a holiday, as they say.”

“When I came over here (to Indiana), as much as I wanted to work in sports, I wanted to make sports my recreation again – where it was something I could unwind doing. But I still wanted to stay in sales and marketing, so I started researching marketing agencies.”

Why Indianapolis? Why Studio Science?

“Indianapolis is a funny place compared to Melbourne,” he imparts. “Indianapolis is small. Melbourne's got four million people. In all of the times we kept coming back to Indianapolis (to visit his wife's relatives and friends), we watched it grow. There's always been something new and different that's come to town.”

“It also doesn't have a lot of the problems the big cities have: traffic congestion and affordability. Melbourne is a really expensive place to live. The median housing price today must be well over \$650,000 – you become a slave to your mortgage after a while. Over here, housing affordability is good. The commute to work is good. To be able to go to schools that are as highly rated as they are up in Carmel was a big thing for us as well.”

Reaching for a football sitting on his desk, he smiles.

“I've always got a football in my hand,” Belli shares. “I'm always fidgeting with something.”

Studio Science's location was one of many attributes that appealed to Belli. He wanted to work in the heart of downtown. The open, collaborative workspaces, stunning views, talented employees and culture drew him in.

“There's no excuse to ... not be successful in this place,” he asserts. He laughs when recalling his first day.

“There's a certain culture that goes along with the sports industry and there's a certain (different) culture that goes along with the design agencies, marketing agencies and working with software developers.”

The self-proclaimed risk-taker who “tries to do things my way,” offers, “I know my personality can sometimes be a bit in your face and



During the interview process, “when I reached out to (company president) Nathan (Sinsabaugh, top left), what I was most impressed with versus a lot of other companies I'd already spoken to in the U.S. was how quick he was to get back on the phone and how willing they (the senior team) were to see me straight away and fit into my schedule. That's typical of the way we treat the clients as well.” People (including co-workers) are a primary reason Belli gravitated to Studio Science.



abrasive, so I thought, ‘Day one, I'll try to curb this and see where it takes us!’”

It didn't take long before Belli felt at home. Likewise, his energy soon inspired those around him.

No regrets

Belli lights up when rattling off the various sporting events he's attended in Indianapolis.

“I used to wake up at 3 o'clock in the morning on a Monday morning to watch the Colts play at 1 p.m. on a Sunday,” he comments. “Now I can go to the stadium, buy a ticket and watch it! And the ability to go watch an NBA game straight after work is quite phenomenal. It's lost on some people here. You have 41 opportunities at least to go see the Pacers. How have you not been to a game?”

While the transition from a familiar life in Australia hasn't been easy, Belli doesn't regret a single moment.

“You think, ‘I'm young, I'm healthy. I'm educated. I've had a good career. This should be a breeze.’ It doesn't always work out like that, though. I'm glad I've had the experience, but make no mistake, it wasn't as easy as anybody says.”

“But fast forward four or five months into this job at Studio Science, and you've got our awesome people you work with every day. You've got a lot of the same shared interests and passions. You've got an instant network of friends. Every day is a new learning opportunity.”