

# FIRST TIME FITOUT

How to Lease, Design and Build  
Your New Office

GEORGE GATT

## **First Time Fitout**

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### I have to do what, by when?

It's 4.30pm and we are on the last day of the project. Everybody is on-site because it's always a rush on the last day and things are getting done; chairs are being delivered, fire extinguishers fitted to the wall, signage happening all over the building, electricians fitting off, cleaners cleaning and me and the foreman are on top of everything. Yep, it's all going to plan. We will be out by 6pm, ready to hand over the next day.

Right.

I'm on the phone and I turn to see a look of panic on my foreman's face – “Oh no, what's wrong?” I could tell it was big.

“The reception's a swimming pool and I'm calling the plumber now,” he shouts. All of a sudden I realise, yet again, it does not matter how long you have been doing this work, stuff can and will go wrong and usually at the worst possible moment.

I walk to reception to find the brand new carpet tiles are soaking. Not just wet, I mean covered in 10mm of water. So, what would you do at that moment?

## FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

Welcome to my world. Office fitout has been my life for the last 25 years and over that time I have experienced a lot, seen a lot and done a lot in this highly specialised area of the building industry

This book is all about providing you with knowledge on this subject so that you gain a clear understanding of the task ahead. You would not be reading this unless you have a project to do and hopefully with my help you will avoid some of the many rookie mistakes that can occur. And if they do happen, how to reduce the damage, fix them and get back on track.

I'll also talk about not just the hands-on experiences but the thinking and focus required to undertake the job. It's not all muscle power and you need to use what's between your ears constantly to gain a very clear understanding around why you're doing this project and the outcomes you're working towards.

Then there are the key denominators that you need to be on top of always.

## **TIME AND MONEY**

Whatever you do, time and money will be affected. From the moment you decide to move until the moment you start trading in your new premises, time and money decisions need to be made.

I will be calling on a few trusted industry professionals I have known throughout the years to provide expert opinion. These guys are good – real good – that's why I wanted their opinions and stories in my book. I'm a builder, not a real estate agent or an interior designer though you have to have knowledge of those areas too. This book is about providing the best knowledge from people who live it every day.

Your project may be a one-off. You may never be in control of another office fitout in your career. However the fact that you're reading this book means you're searching for answers or direction.

What you'll get here is plenty of real life stories I have been a part of. You'll read what really happens throughout the process to open up your eyes, give you some tools that you can use and all the things you need to have a transparent, uncomplicated and uniquely pleasant building experience.

So what happened with the swimming pool?

First things first – you cut the water supply by turning the meter off. Secondly call the plumber. There is going to be a pipe somewhere that needs repairing fast. Thirdly think of all the reasons why this could have happened and go through them one by one. Here's our shortlist of what may have happened:

1. Joiners have drilled a screw into a pipe when fitting cupboards to the treatment room.
2. Fire extinguisher guys have drilled a screw into a pipe when fitting extinguishers in the hallway.
3. Electricians have moved a pipe when pulling cables.
4. A pipe has burst for an unknown reason even after pressure testing.

The plumber arrives on-site and we are all silent while the water gets turned back on – swish, you can hear the water pouring out from behind the reception wall that backs onto the treatment room. “Turn it off,” shouts the plumber, “that’s where the problem is.” Genius.

Right behind the new feature wall in reception. Are you kidding me? This is the first wall that people see when they enter. Oh well, cut it open.

## FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

Sure enough, there is an open pipe behind the wall. A young apprentice is about to be shot but not before he is given a lesson in cleaning up water. He had not checked all the joints correctly and when the hot water unit had been fired up by the electricians that afternoon the connection had let go causing the swimming pool.

Okay, one problem resolved but what about the other problem? We are handing this over at 8am tomorrow and it needs to be operational. Here's what happened:

- Pipe fixed.
- Water soaked up.
- Hole in wall patched.
- Patch set with plaster.
- Huge fan purchased (to dry out carpet) left on all night.
- Midnight - we leave site (so much for 6pm).
- Painter and us back on-site at 6am to make the reception wall new again.

Like everything in life, no matter how much you try to cover all bases and ensure everything is under control stuff just happens. It's how you then analyse the situation; use your knowledge (or someone else's) to get back on track that delivers the results.

I hope you enjoy my book.



## CHAPTER 2

# START AT THE START

### Why are you doing this?

It's very important at the start of any project that everyone knows what the objective is.

Without the 'Why' it's hard to understand anything else.

A few questions to ask yourself are:

- Why are you moving offices?
- Who are the key players?
- What are the expected outcomes?
- Most importantly, what are they expecting of you?

The main reasons for relocating an office include:

- Upsizing – the company is in growth stage.
- Downsizing – the company is reducing staff.
- Cost saving on lease – a favourable rate over your current landlord.
- Impressions – Management want to create a better workplace for clients.

- **Functionality** – Management want to create a better place to work for employees.

## **YOU NEED TO KNOW YOUR ‘WHY’**

As the project manager responsible for your new business premises, you need to know the reasons and therefore the outcomes you’re expected to deliver.

It is always best to get these answers from the key stakeholders of the business and get them in writing to provide clear direction for you to follow.

Make sure you are very clear on the objectives because this will help your project run smoothly and deliver the goods. You need clarification on such things as the number of people to be accommodated, the type of building structure, A B or C grade space, commercial or industrial, location (city or suburbs). Plus proximity to public transport and how that will affect current and new employees. Discuss how long the lease should be and whether the business intends to purchase the property.

There are business specific considerations such as are loading docks required, customer parking, client perception and impressions. What are the key elements that affect your business and make it run at optimum performance?

You don’t want small details at this point. You’re after high-level viewpoints. Those small details will be flushed out in later stages of the process.

At this point you also need to establish the other key players involved in the process. Plan to meet with them at a set time and set period throughout the project.

## **OTHER KEY PLAYERS**

- Information Technology (IT) – the guys that link your business to the rest of the world.
- Accounts – there will always be bills, so get to know the key accounts person.
- Human Resources (HR) – it’s important to understand the requirements of all employees and the working agreements in place.
- Marketing – signage and the image required for clientele play a large part in the fitout design.

## **MEETING MINUTES ARE CRUCIAL**

Minutes written by you and distributed in a timely manner will ensure everyone knows what was said, what was agreed and who is doing what. It’s the best way to provide an instant report to anyone up the line and the starting agenda for the next project meeting.

The first step to a successful project is to understand the ‘Why’ for your key stakeholders. Identify their key desired outcomes. This provides the clarity you need to select your project management team of internal and external professionals.

**PRO TIP:** Don't at any time ask everyone in the business what they think about this or that, or you will be bombarded with opinions and questions for the duration of the project. This will cause you to question your decisions, engage in long conversations and waste a lot of very essential time on trivialities. If you have an internal project team use them, your boss and the experts you are about to engage.

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## **SUMMARY**

- Ask questions so that you understand the overall 'Why'.
- The people to ask are the stakeholders of the business.
- Get their answers in writing.
- Discussion points: number of people to accommodate, the type of building structure, A B or C grade space, commercial or industrial, location (city or suburbs), proximity to public transport.
- Additional discussion points: will you need loading docks, customer parking, is client perception important?
- Understand the other key players involved in the project.
- Keep good meeting notes to protect yourself and keep the project on track.

# CHAPTER 3

## THE TOOLBOX

### Keeping your tools sharp

One of the first things you learn as an apprentice carpenter is always keep your tools sharp. They work better that way. It's a simple statement that makes sense. Sometimes we all let our tools get a little bit blunt.

I want to introduce you to my essential tools of fitout management and I'll then go into detail about each over the next three chapters.

Bear with me here, because this is the holistic 'woo-woo' part of the book. C'mon every book has one!

My tools may not be exactly what you would imagine. There's no need to run down to *Bunnings* as there are no hammers required, just some plain old fundamental skills that we all have. The trick is to keep switching them on every day when you come to work and ensure they are sharp and working at 100 per cent.

## **MY TOOLS IN THE TOOLBOX**

- Thinking
- Focus
- Time management
- Money management

### **TOOL NO. 1: THINKING**

Let me tell you what I think about thinking – not enough people do it. If your mind's not switched on, then this office building process will end in tears. You have to be across many different levels depending on where you're at in the project.

#### **BIG VIEW THINKING**

This is right at the start of the journey. It's when you move from concept to thinking about a lease, what does your business need now and what will it need in three to five years' time?

#### **DETAILED THINKING**

You have selected a property and now need to get the details out to experts so you build what your business needs to be the best, most productive and inspiring company it can be.

#### **ACTION THINKING**

It's go time here and you must be on your toes. Construction has started and it's busy on-site. There is action everywhere and your pulse is racing.

### **COMPLETION THINKING**

The project is nearing completion and it will be a smooth ending as long as you are in the completion-thinking mindset. Have you got everything under control?

### **TOOL NO. 2: FOCUS**

As if thinking was not hard enough! Now you have to focus too. It's the only way to follow through on all that thinking. If there is no focus on the tasks, then those great thoughts will always remain that - thoughts.

#### **Without Focus there is no action**

**Business Strategy Focus** is the period from conception through to design. It's basically where you'll focus on all the things that will benefit the business from this building project. It's where you must be on the ball, gathering information about the business activities. It's short to medium planning; your lease has been signed and the design is almost complete. Lose focus here and you may not get everything you want in your fitout.

**Construction Focus** is the period from design to handover. The office space is turned into a building site and the walls are erected. You, as the project manager have just got busier. The game is on and it will only last so long, so you need to make sure you are kicking goals all the time before the final whistle blows.

### **TOOL NO. 3: TIME MANAGEMENT**

Time is the first of two key denominators that will span the entire project process, always vitally important.

Without an awareness of time your project will end in tears.

It is vital that with every stage and every key step you take that a non-negotiable time frame is understood and agreed upon by all parties. Commitment to time is an absolute key to success.

#### **TOOL NO. 4: MONEY MANAGEMENT**

Money Management is the second key denominator, which like time spans the entire project process and one that requires accountant-like control.

Money is part of every decision you make. From what property to lease, to the type of furniture you select, down to the sign you put on your entry door.

Money, like time, needs to be controlled and a series of budgets to undertake moving the business should be developed using business planning and future forecasting as the inputs.

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**PRO TIP:** Remember to 'STAY SHARP' and switch on your tools. Use them to your best ability and they will build you great new business premises.

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## **SUMMARY**

- The four essential tools are: thinking, focus, time management and money management.
- Get your thinking cap on – for Big View Thinking, Detailed View Thinking, Action Thinking and Completion Thinking.
- Focus means putting plans into action.
- Focus on what the business needs and what happens on a daily basis in the construction period.
- Make time a non-negotiable element of the build.
- Control the money with a passion.



# CHAPTER 4

## FITOUT THINKING

### Four stages to mastery

If you have never done something before it can be quite daunting. Think of it like baking a cake. Until you read a recipe or someone has shown you how to do it, you know it won't be a great success. You have to think through the processes required to make that cake while reading and being shown and whilst hands-on mixing the batter.

Building your new office premises is the same thing. You must be thinking every step of the way.

Whilst writing this book I did some thinking about how I have operated for the last 25 years and in my mind there are four specific stages of thinking that you will go through on your office building journey. They are the keys to completing a successful project and why I focus on them quite a bit in this book.

## **STAGE 1 – BIG VIEW THINKING**

You need to start the journey with an overview of what is really required from your new premises. For example:

- How many staff do we have now – how many will we need in three to five years' time and how much additional office and/or factory space will we need then?
- Where are we located now and is it in our best interest to remain here? Or should we look for an area out of the city where rent might be cheaper?
- Where are our clients based and do they come to us? If so, do we need to have an impressive office or create an image in our premises design that will appeal to our clients?
- Do we need to move within a specific time frame and what are the consequences if we don't move by that time?

You get the idea. It's high-level, overview thinking to ensure that you and your team know the reasons why you're moving, what outcomes you need to achieve and when you need to achieve them. It's the **GAME PLAN**.

I suggest you write this information down and refer to it often. It will guide a lot of your decisions and provide a reference point to return to once the meetings are finished and people start to question various decisions. With your Game Plan document to refer to, it's easy to reassure people with the sound decision-making processes you undertook and the valid reasons you all agreed on for doing X or Y.

At this point don't be distracted by all the minutiae thoughts like, "Do we need a coffee machine here or there."

Note these questions down, but don't spend time on them – they come into the next stage. All you're concerned about here is the bigger picture.

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**PRO TIP:** Start writing a wish list of all the elements you want to have in your new office and these can be defined and refined in Stage 2: Detailed Thinking.

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## **STAGE 2 – DETAILED THINKING**

As a builder, you never want to hear this at handover of the job, “Hey George, where are those under bench boiling/chilled water units we wanted for each of the four kitchens?”

My usual answer is, “What under bench boiling/chilled water units? Let's have a look at the plans.”

Some of the detailed things are expensive so thinking about them at handover is never good – the budget is usually well done and dusted.

Most instances where a client wants something right at the end of the build, but can't have it because of budget reasons, is a result of not thinking through the detailed needs early enough. Your detailed thinking at an early stage of the project will ensure you get all the little nice to-haves in your build. It also makes them more economical to buy and install – last-minute stuff is never cheap!

**PRO TIP:** Ask your builder and designer to suggest anything they think you will need.

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The detailed thinking is vital:

1. Sometimes putting it in later is just not that easy. Other services may need altering or moving. For example, what if you now decide you need a doorway there... but there's a water pipe behind that wall.
2. Putting things in after the construction is finished, is expensive. You will always pay more to supply and install something after the building is complete, especially if the builder has left the site and then has to return for minor requests because you forgot to think about it at the design stage.

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**PRO TIP:** Have a look at your existing office areas and consider what you'd change in a new office. Do I need more power points? Do I need a power point above my desk so it's easy to plug in my phone charger? Do I have enough storage? Can I hold a meeting in my office – would a meeting table and chairs be a good option or should I use a meeting room? Do I need more light – what about natural light or a window?

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Go to each area of the business and ask the people sitting there, day in and day out what they'd like. Be careful! Don't get them all involved or you'll be flooded with requests and people get disappointed when their requests don't happen – pick out the key area leaders and ask just them.

## **STAGE 3 – ACTION THINKING**

So the lease is signed and plans are set. You're ready to start work on-site; the builder arrives ready to strike the first blow and turns on the lights... except there's no power.

You have forgotten to call the power company to let them know that you need the power turned on.

Say goodbye to your builder. He can't get much done without power.

Stage 3 thinking is all about ACTION or 'What Happens Next' thinking. Am I ready? Do I have the answers for my builder?

Stage 3 is where you're thinking about all the logical steps that might happen on-site. Your goal is to be ahead of the game with the aim of keeping the project rolling along without any stoppages or delays for things that should have been considered earlier.

Things that will stop a job in its tracks:

- No power on-site.
- No amenities on-site.
- Incorrect paperwork or failing to get inducted by the building manager.

- Non-compliance with the building manager's Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) requirements.
- Nominated key subcontractor not being informed, e.g., you want a security system installed but tell the company too late, and the gyprockers are delayed because the security guys need behind-the-wall access, but can't get there until Thursday.

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**PRO TIP:** Provide your nominated contractors with a copy of the construction program with the estimated work dates so they can arrange to be on-site when required to complete their works.

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Nobody knows your office better than you. You have been involved all the way along so that makes you the key person to recognise anything that's just not right or may not work during the construction phase of the project.

By thinking about the logical steps, you are trying to stay one step in front of the builder. This will enable you to identify things that may have been missed or maybe put in the wrong place. There are a number of reasons why this happens:

- Tradespeople working from an outdated plan.
- Tradespeople measuring incorrectly.
- Items left off the construction set of plans and not picked up in the review.
- Elements of design are discussed but not always put on the plan.



## STAGE 4 – COMPLETION THINKING

Completion Thinking is like Stage 3 except it happens faster and the consequences for missing something can cause you major headaches.

Completion thinking is the end of the line, it's do or die; it's will we be open for business on Monday as planned or will we have to open next week. It's all about chasing up everything and everyone to ensure that what people said would happen, really happens. It's the last five minutes of a close sports game where you can be the hero and kick the winning goal or you can miss and be a bum.

It's an adrenalin rush; it's frustrating, it's slam the phone down time. Emotions can and will run wild in the week leading up to handover especially when the time frame has been tight from the beginning.

So how do you get through it? Checklists.

Write down everything, and I mean everything, that you know has to happen and hang onto this list until completion. Keep reviewing and adding to it as you see things that must be done. Keep marking them off as you see things completed.

Your thinking must be about completion – you just have to get things done.

The best advice I ever got about completion thinking was from my old workmate Silvano. Silvano was a fantastic tradesman an Italian joiner with the highest skills who used to work in the joinery shop attached to the office I worked in when I first came to Sydney.

He was always there when I would arrive back at the office after my morning site rounds and he would always ask the same question, "George," he would yell out, then in a quiet voice as he tapped the underside of his wooden workbench, "All under George, all under control?"

Every day, every time I saw him, a tap of the bench and those words... “All Under George, all Under Control?” Just stop and think about this.

Completion Thinking is about having everything under control.

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**PRO TIP:** Be your own Silvano and keep asking yourself...  
‘All under you, all under Control?’

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## **SUMMARY**

- Twenty-five years of experience has shown me four clear stages to mastering the fitout game: Big View Thinking, Detailed Thinking, Action Thinking and Completion Thinking.
- Big View Thinking is simply getting the bigger picture set in your head.
- Detailed Thinking is the considerations about smaller things – like where the power points will be, etc.
- Action Thinking is all the thinking that puts plans into place. What do you need to start the build? (Is the power on, do you have certification organised, etc.)
- Completion Thinking is where it all comes together very quickly. What can go wrong does, what you’ve not thought of catches up with you.
- Your saviour at completion will be checklists.

## CHAPTER 5

# THE IMPORTANCE OF FOCUS

**F**ocus is... ‘The function of zooming in on your thinking and making sure all the items written in the Game Plan are now followed through to completion.’

So why is it critically important to focus on your thinking?

Without focus, your thinking will stagnate and the project will not move forward. Your focus needs to be like a laser beam, clear and sharp, targeted on all the things essential to the project.

It’s the act of getting people moving towards giving you the answers, results, decisions, products and items that you need to move forward.

If you don’t have focus or you only have partial focus, then you will only receive some of the results.

Think about the word focus – it means to see clearly... in focus

Without focus, your project vision will be blurry. A blurry focus will not lead to a successful project.

There are two essential phases of focus in the lease, design and construction of an office and these are Business Strategy Focus and Control Process Focus.

## **BUSINESS STRATEGY FOCUS**

This encapsulates all the things you have been thinking about that will benefit the business with the undertaking of this building project.

Your business planning and strategies now start to align with the design thinking and key players are in agreement. Deadlines centre on lease negotiations, contract signing. Design meetings are on target and moving forward.

## **WHAT CAN HAPPEN IF YOU DON'T HAVE FOCUS IN THIS AREA?**

Critical dates can be missed. A client I had was very busy planning the office and how it would look and was very excited about the complete design process. He was so excited that he forgot about the lease deadlines and subsequently did not have his documentation in place on time. Result was that the landlord, quite within his rights, offered the property to another company who jumped in and took the space. My client needed to start the whole process again. This lack of focus can be expensive in both time and money, clear focus will make sure you don't get things out of order.

This lack of focus on a key element led to much expense. He had engaged an architect to draw up plans. Loads of personal time where he was involved in design meetings with the architect and staff were all a waste of time due to lack of focus on one critical element.

Another more common example occurs during the design stage where many, many things are discussed in a design meeting

and people are busy writing and drawing all the changes on the plans. There can be as many as 10 people sitting around a table all providing input in their particular area of the business. The new plans are drawn up based on the discussions then reviewed and approved for construction.

Often at this point there is a lapse in focus. Plans are reviewed and approved but the process is often rushed and not reviewed in detail, plans are signed off but are incorrect.

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**PRO TIP:** The devil is in the detail. Keep this saying in mind as you focus your way through the Business Strategy focus phase.

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## **CONTROL THE PROCESS FOCUS**

This is the period from design to handover where the office space is turned into a building site and the walls are starting to be erected.

The focus is specifically about construction and concentrates on all the things required to pull the project together. It's usually a highly concentrated period of time where most of the money is spent – so staying on top of things is paramount.

Without a focus on controlling the process, things will just get left to the guys on-site to figure out. Which is okay, except you will get a different result to the one you want.

As the client, you have selected a builder whom you have trust and faith in to complete the works. Make sure this is your first selection criteria! You expect that the job will get done as discussed, to plan, on time and budget.

To ensure that this happens your focus must be on constant daily communication with your builder or as you see fit. You need to be sure that he has turned up on-site on the days he agreed, that works are progressing and sub-trades are also performing. Make sure any unforeseen problems that occur along the way are documented and resolved as fast as possible.

If there are problems, focus on resolving them as fast as possible. Look out for problems that will cause delays or variations in cost. You don't want the trades to stop work and leave the site due to a problem, because they may start another job and won't come back when you want them to because you are not their only client. A fast resolution is key, but this will require focus and concentration. Don't get sidetracked by other demands and distractions.

The focus required in the closing week of any project is extremely high – you just have to be on your game. Not only are you focusing on completion of the building elements but you will be focusing on relocation of the business and all the sundry items as a part of the relocation – you're going to be busy.

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**PRO TIP:** If your intentions are to spend only a few hours on-site in the last week, rethink this immediately. I can guarantee there will be additional items that need your personal attention and as a rule you will spend twice as long as you thought you might.

The last week is like the last five minutes of a close game and your ability to focus will be the difference between victory and not quite making it.

A great way to ensure you focus throughout the project is to record the minutes of every meeting you have. Minutes correctly documented and distributed to all parties involved are the number one way to maintain focus and create a successful build.

Meeting notes should be neatly written in the same format each week and detail whom is responsible for each item and what must be done before the next meeting. Minutes are a leverage tool that you can use to keep all parties and even yourself accountable and focused.

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## **SUMMARY**

- Group what you need to focus on into two distinct stages of focus – Business Strategy focus and Control the Process focus.
- Business Strategy focus is an overview type of focus.
- Control the Process focus is a day-to-day details type of focus.
- Be in constant communication with your builder.
- Be ready to address problems immediately.
- The best way to stay across all the details is to have lists and take good notes of every meeting.





## CHAPTER 6

# UNDERSTANDING TIME AND MONEY

**W**hat you have to understand about these two key denominators is that they will run side by side for the duration of your entire project. It will be crucial to ensure that you have robust methods in place to control and monitor their progress.

People involved with the project will always be asking you, “Hey, when is this happening, what time do you want that delivered, how much is that going to cost and what’s in the budget for this item?”

Time and money are your barometers of how the project is progressing and a way of forecasting the future weeks ahead. So let’s look at each item individually to see how they work.

### **TIME**

Without any awareness of time, your project will end in tears and be over budget, a domino effect ending in real problems for you. It is vital at every key stage that a non-negotiable time frame is

understood and agreed upon by all parties. Commitment to time is the key to success.

To help you manage time I suggest you do the following:

- Develop a Construction Program.
- Have regular site visits.
- Insist on weekly meetings (with minutes taken).

So what is a construction program? It's a very simple Gantt chart that shows all the activities of the project on the left-hand side listed in the order that they are required on-site. Running across the top of the page is time, which might be hours, days, or most commonly in weeks.

You should highlight any item that has a time pressure against it. Start using the construction program at the very beginning of the project, this will ensure critical timekeeping is paramount from the beginning.

Too often, I have seen time burnt up at the start of a project whilst the client has been dealing with landlords, or getting bogged down in design, leading to crazy construction times at the back-end of the project. This leads to escalated costs due to overtime and leaves no time for a smooth transition to the new premises.

Take time at the very beginning to work out what is critical to you and your business. Write down the ideal dates by which you want to achieve these critical items. Mark them on your construction program and highlight them in red. You now have target dates that are highlighted on the construction program and the team can work towards them.

**PRO TIP:** Don't keep your construction program a secret. Give it to everyone involved in the project. Get everyone on board with the time frame especially the key players such as your:

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- Boss (if you have one).
- Your internal project team (if you have one).
- Solicitor – to ensure the lease paperwork is complete when required.
- Designer – to make them aware you have deadlines with the design.
- Builder – so trades can be aligned and ready to start when required.
- Removalist – locked into relocate.

Other key items:

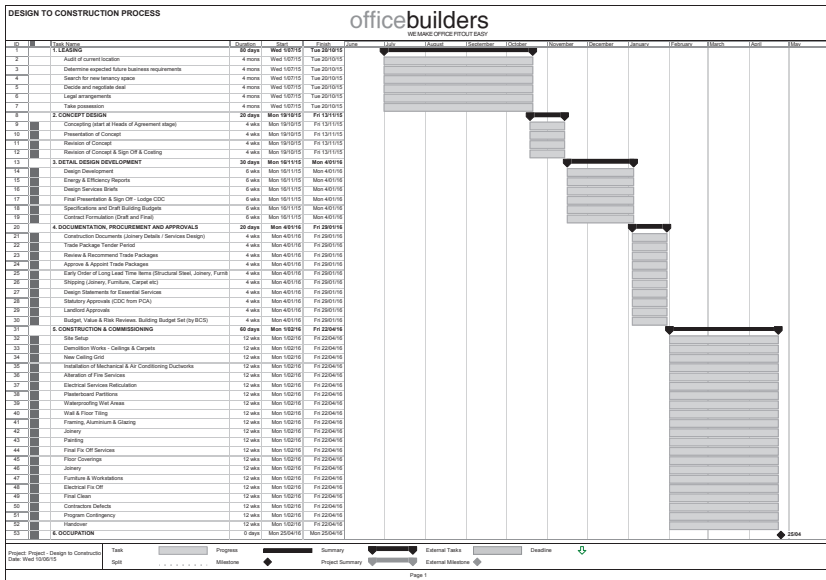
- Telstra or you Internet Service Provider (ISP)
- The company that handles your computers or your IT department.
- Clients – so they know where to find you.
- Business specific equipment.

I often hear that construction program time plans are a waste of paper and no one looks at them so don't bother writing one up. This is usually said by the person who can't manage time. On every successful project I have ever run there has always been a construction program. They are an essential tool that you should not work without.

# FIRST TIME FITOUT

They are very rarely 100 per cent accurate on a day-by-day basis, but they're a planning tool. Dates will slide forward and backward over the project, but they keep you on track and pushing when you need too. As long as you meet your final deadline date, then the program has done its job.

As one long-time colleague and great friend always says, "You have to have a plan, you can't change a plan if you don't have one to begin with."



Once under construction, regular site visits are another great way to monitor time by seeing for yourself the progress on-site and how it is tracking compared to the construction program.

**PRO TIP:** It's very easy for a builder to tell you yeah, yeah it's all going to plan and because you are busy you don't bother going on-site. Don't do this. Builders have been known to stretch the truth sometimes and mislead you into a false sense of security. Do your own homework – get to site and inspect for yourself.

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Are you interstate? I have completed jobs all over Australia and thanks to a digital camera and email, photos are a great way to get updates on progress – ask for them weekly.

Weekly meetings between yourself and everyone involved are a great way to stay on track with time. As discussed earlier there is nothing quite like the pressure of an upcoming scheduled weekly meeting to kick you into action. With our ever-increasing busy schedules, things can be pushed to the back of the pile or just simply forgotten, but knowing there is a scheduled weekly meeting drives you to make sure you're ready when it's your turn to speak.

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**PRO TIP:** Whoever is responsible for taking the minutes and distribution must provide them in the same format each week. It's critical to note the person/s responsible for following up on specific items and actions.

It is also essential that the minutes be distributed no later than Close Of Business (COB) the day after the meeting. There is nothing worse than constantly receiving the minutes from a weekly meeting the day before the next weekly meeting – it's pointless and you have lost the control that the weekly meetings can give you.

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**SAMPLE MINUTES:**

**Construction meeting No. 3**

**Clinic Name** : Gladstone  
**State** : Qld  
**Date** : 22 January 2014

**Attendees:**

David O'Rourke (DR)  
 Jane Wild (JW)  
 Jim Hardy (JH) George Gatt (GG)

Items	Comments/Outcomes	Actions
<b>Hydraulics</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Lines inspected and concreted in. <input type="checkbox"/> Existing rainwater tank disconnected. Only one line & meter at site. Mains to be split to facilitate correct toilet water feed to both tenancies.	1. DR to obtain landlord permission to undertake mains split work.
<b>Electrical</b>	First fix to commence tomorrow.	
<b>IT</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> WAN line – Telstra have reported a design solution but no installation date yet received. Investigations into an interim 3G option no longer required. <input type="checkbox"/> Telstra technician in contact with site supervisor for installation when comms room completed. <input type="checkbox"/> Rack received on-site. <input type="checkbox"/> JW provided rack layout diagram to GG.	2. Equipment delivery date to be decided at next meeting. 3. Rack packing slip to be forwarded to JW to confirm correct type was delivered.

Items	Comments/Outcomes	Actions
<b>Air conditioning</b>	DR agreed to additional spend in order to increase capability of system to ensure clinic is adequately cooled. Work to commence this week.	
<b>Partitioning</b>	Gyprock to be delivered early next week. Work to commence 29 Feb.	
<b>Floorplan drawings</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Extra power/data points added to various rooms. <input type="checkbox"/> Aluminium crossbars removed from Manager's office glazing. <input type="checkbox"/> Door heights in reception offices reduced to.	4. DR to provide dimensions of water cooler to GG.
<b>Audio booths, audiometers &amp; bench seating</b>		1. DR to liaise with GG in order to provide both suppliers with convenient delivery dates.
<b>Build Contract &amp; associated documents</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Signed contract received and reviewed by Client Legal Dept and suggested amendments made.	2. DR to forward amended copy to GG for review and consideration.
<b>A.O.B</b>		3. GG to source and procure suitable dishwasher.

Gladstone Qld – Construction meeting 22/01/2014  
 Next meeting: 5 February @ 9:00am AWST

## KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

One key discussion point at every weekly meeting should be the construction program. Make this the number one point for discussion.

## FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

It will give you an immediate idea of where everything is at and you will soon hear from people if there is a problem or if everything is on track.

Weekly meetings are a great forum for members of the project team to voice an opinion or an issue they might have on their particular area of the project. It's far better for someone to voice a problem at the start of a job when there is still time to source other solutions or work around the problem rather than in the last week when it's all too late. As the meeting director you should encourage all members to participate and voice issues weekly.

## **MONEY**

The second key denominator, money also spans the entire fitout process and one that requires accountant-like control. Money will form a part of every decision you make – from what property to lease to the type of furniture you select, down to the signage on your entry door. Money needs to be controlled and a strict budget set based on your business planning and future forecasting.

The big financial commitments of the project need to be addressed at the very start of the project. They will generally be nominated as the lease and the fitout. It's important to have your budget in writing and agreed upon by your business directors before you start the building process.

## **FACTOR IN ALL THE COSTS**

The lease, of course is an ongoing monthly commitment by the business and when you are paying approximately \$350–\$500 per



metre squared per annum to rent that floor space the financial commitment quickly adds up. E.g.,  $425(\text{m}^2) \times \$350 = \$127,500$  per year. Multiply that by the term of the lease (say a minimum three years) and you are committed to \$382,500.

The other big commitment, is of course, the building cost. Let's assume you have leased the 425 m<sup>2</sup> of clear office space with carpet, ceilings, lights and air conditioning in position. Depending on your business's specific requirements, the cost to fitout this space in a standard arrangement will be between \$950 – \$1500 m<sup>2</sup> e.g.,  $425 \text{ m}^2 \times \$950 = \$403,750$ .

That is money that will need to be paid in a very short-term, once the business has committed to the new lease. It's essential that the money is set aside by the business.

The very first phone conversation I have with a prospect is usually around them asking how much will it cost to construct an office fitout. This depends on a number of factors and it's like buying a new car.

## **HOW MUCH DO YOU WANT TO SPEND?**

You choose the model of car but the level of options and extras you select can take the price to double the base price very quickly. Office fitout costs can do exactly the same.

This is where you need to have a wish list of all the items you want in your new office so that when you are getting pricing for construction you can provide clear and precise details of what you want.

**PRO TIP:** Don't provide different information to different builders and expect to get back identical quotes. When calling for quotes, you must provide exactly the same information each time so that you can get back comparable pricing.

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Some people like to quote squared metre rates over the phone - this is without seeing any plans, visiting the site or meeting with the client to obtain a better scope of what is required. Just how valid is that price going to be without further details?

### **WHAT THEY'RE REALLY DOING**

They are using the old door-to-door salesman trick of getting a foot in the door. The problem is if you base your construction budget on this quote then you start off with a very low base. You will soon find that just like buying a car, to get the features you want will cost a lot more than the advertised square metre price.

Don't fall into the low squared metre trap; like most things you only ever get what you pay for. It's true – pay peanuts and you will get monkeys.

Can you actually pay too much for a fitout? Absolutely. I have won projects where I have applied our standard overhead and margin rates and found out from the client that I had comfortably won the job on price by more than 40 per cent. I was 40 per cent cheaper than my opposition yet we priced the same thing and I had not cut any of my standard mark-ups and margin. So why is that?

There are a several factors that come into play as a builder when pricing a job and you need to be aware of these.

## **WATCH OUT**

- If the builder is busy they might lift margins so if they win the job it becomes a very profitable job for them. Problem is, if they are too busy, you may end up paying a lot and still not get great service because they are so busy.
- If the builder is busy, they might take on your job but stretch their subcontractors or bring in new contractors who they have not used before, which can lead to problems keeping to the program.
- Some builders are quite picky. If your job is on a difficult site or has some inherent work problems like really tall ceilings, then builders will make additional allowances that can be excessive, lifting the cost of the quote.

## **MONITOR WELL**

You need to monitor, manage and control the costs of the project and this can be done in many project reporting software packages that you may already use. A simple excel spreadsheet will also do the trick.

- Keep a hard copy of all the bills you receive for payment in one file so that you have an instant record of everything you have received. Ideally you will also stamp them when you approved payment and added the cost against your budget.
- By maintaining a hard copy of all the bills you receive, it will avoid any confusion when you receive a second or third bill from the same supplier. It is not unusual for

## FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

some suppliers to send out multiple copies of the same invoice, making it easy to pay for the same thing twice. Should you get multiple invoices then you can cross-check the invoice numbers to ensure there is no double up.

As the project manager, your role will always involve money and the best way to ensure peace of mind in your role is the following:

- You have an understanding of the business's financial commitment and your role in it.
- You have budget agreed to in writing by all the stakeholders.
- You have a way of tracking and maintaining your budget throughout the project.
- You obtain fixed written quotations from all providers clearly detailing the product or service that they will provide.

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**PRO TIP:** It's very easy when managing project financials to just let the accounts slide for a week or two... **DON'T DO IT.** It's essential that you review weekly to ensure you are on track.

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## **SUMMARY**

- Get organised early with reference to the two most critical factors in your build – time and money.
- A construction program keeps everyone honest.
- Go on-site – judge progress for yourself at least once a week.
- Keep minutes – well-documented with action and persons responsible.
- Get the budget sorted out early on and in writing.
- Keep a vice-like grip on costs and understand early on the full commitment you are making.
- The costs come down to the options you choose.
- Get quotes based on the same information.
- Keep accurate files and check what's happening weekly.



# CHAPTER 7

# LEASING

## The big business picture

Leasing of commercial office space has over the years affected my business quite a lot... generally when my clients have not paid enough attention to the leasing arrangements and they fail to really grasp and define what the lease means and what they have committed to.

A bad lease will generally end up:

- Costing the client a lot in rent – their lack of knowledge and understanding means they sign up for above market price, do not receive a standard incentive or commit to excessive rent rise percentages at each yearly review.
- Delaying the signing of a lease means that any building works cannot proceed, because without an owner consent signature on council forms, nothing can start. We need to have a sensible and realistic timetable to achieve parallel activities, and make sure the lease is in place so that other important issues can be undertaken with certainty.
- A crazy rush to get the project complete because of the delays caused in signing the lease causes the tenant to end up paying

additional money to get the fitout complete in a short time. It's important to avoid crisis decisions that always cost money and being able to understand the leasing process is just part of the relocation process.

The lease is a critical part of the complete process for moving office and not given the attention it fully needs.

Leasing commercial industrial retail and/or specialist space like a medical suite is quite an expensive part of any business's overheads. Once the lease is signed your business is committed for a number of years to that monthly payment. Rent and outgoings must be budgeted over the term of the lease, together with realistic tax and depreciation estimates, to give a full budget picture before binding commitments are made.

So let's start at the beginning – it's all about the company.

- What industry sector are you in?  
Pharmaceuticals have different profiles to small engineering companies. Specific industry needs must be defined so that a search for a suitable property can begin.
- Is the business growing or contracting and at what rate?  
Review the last three year's business performance and make projections for the next three, five or ten years. This will help forecast growth. How many metres squared have you leased previously and what do your plans, industry knowledge and growth prospects tell you that you'll need in the future? Are different parts of the business growing at different rates? Does your current lease or the lease you may be considering have an Expansion Option and if so do you understand how to act on it?



- Why the relocation? Could you stay put and reconfigure?  
What impact would this have on your current business performance?
- What is the driver for change – the main reason you need to relocate your office? It may be one of many things:
  - Too much space.
  - Too little space.
  - A developing business line may require different space modelling.
  - New business competition.
  - Expanding into new markets.

#### Space Planning:

- How much space do you currently work from now and how much space will you need in three years' time?  
Try to estimate five to six years into the future.
- What is your industry doing in the marketplace?  
Is there a revolution like film to digital happening?  
Will you require the massive space you have now?  
Because of the way you operate do you need less space but can still grow? Are you about to outsource three departments?
- What is the projected rate of growth over the next three, five, ten years and how confident are you with the predictions? If contemplating 10 years, how is the lease structured to cope? Is there an Expansion clause?  
What tax position are you in? How is the fitout to be funded?
- If a lease incentive is taken, make sure it is tax effective. You need to be aware of the depreciation and capital cost of the lease to maximise the tax benefits available to your business.

### Current Lease:

- What is the expiry date of your current lease?
- Do you know your options and how to exercise them?
- How much notice must you legally give your current landlord – a week, a month, six months or twelve months?
- Before an option is exercised, how much is the new rent going to cost? If the option is exercised – you stay where you are – and no rent has been agreed upon, there may be a dispute mechanism in the lease for a third party lateral determination. This is usually half way between the owner and tenant positions. Your lease rate may even come down.

All of these elements define your very real timeline for making decisions on the existing and the new lease. Is there a hatchet clause at the option of rent review?

### **HOW MUCH SHOULD I BE PAYING?**

Search the alternatives in a broad sense to judge the current market rates for space on a square metre basis, use this for budgeting purposes.

### **SUMMARY**

- Make sure you fully understand the lease.
- Understand the commitment you're making.
- Forecast your likely requirements out by three, five and ten years if possible.

## CHAPTER 8

# YOU LEASED WHAT?

**W**hen selecting a property there is much to think about and decide. Just like buying a new car, there are many choices to be made. There might be two makes you like, each offering their distinct good and bad points. But at some point you must make a decision on which one will suit you best overall.

The same with property – you might find two with similar space at about the same rent, of similar standard and in the same vicinity – but how do you decide which one is for you?

### LOOK A LITTLE CLOSER

Look at the lease agreement and all of the clauses that define what you will pay now and importantly what you will pay in the future.

- Is there a fitout incentive or a rent-free period?
- What about parking – how many spots are available under the lease?

## **LOOK CLOSER AT THE PHYSICAL BUILDING**

Which way do your windows face – will you get afternoon sun?

Are there shower facilities or a bike parking station?

Is the building about to undergo major renovations – is that a good thing or a bad thing? How will that interrupt your business?

How close is the building to public transport?

## **LET'S ADDRESS SOME OF THESE ITEMS**

Spatial analysis. What is it first of all? It's the process of examining the locations, attributes, and relationships of features in spatial data through overlay and other analytical techniques in order to address a question or gain useful knowledge. Simply said, to review the floor shapes, accessibility and general attributes in order to define if it can work for you.

In what geographic area is the premises and what other areas would you consider? It's important to have in mind your ideal premises and ideal location. You must always have alternatives as this allows you some flexibility if the ideal location cannot be found. It may even provide a better long-term deal by taking premises that might be outside the Central Business District (CBD) but at reduced rent or even a new building. Staff travel profiles are very important in the decision process when assessing geographic location.

## LOCATING SUITABLE PREMISES

Finding new premises is a project within a project and not something that can be done with a couple of clicks on *Google*. It's a good starting point though, along with:

- Driving around the area.
- Using a commercial real estate agent.
- Utilising a tenant representative.

Commercial real estate agents have a list of their clients' particular stock properties that are on the market for lease and they act on their behalf whilst dealing with you.

Tenant Representatives provide an alternative that I believe is far more beneficial to you than going directly to an agent. 'Tenant Reps' as they are known are engaged by businesses to seek out and find the best property to suit their business needs. Based on a brief that you provide, the Rep will review the market, find several prospective premises and then negotiate on your behalf to ensure that you get the best deal in the marketplace and that the building you move into has no foreseeable downsides.

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### PRO TIPS:

- Find some alternatives, this will give you the bargaining power you need to negotiate – always have other options.
- Select a property – make sure it's the best one to fit your business and ensure it ticks the key areas on your initial game plan that you developed with your team.

## FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

- Let the tenant rep do the negotiating; this is what they are good at and can save you considerable time and money if they do it well.
  - What is the length of the lease? Make sure that it suits your requirements. There might only be a short-term lease available because they are going to redevelop the premises – if so, is this really a great long-term prospect for you?
  - Depreciation three, five, ten years. The lease period and depreciation are linked, seek advice from an accountant.
- 

## **SUMMARY**

- Your choice of property needs careful weighing up.
- Do your homework, driven by plenty of research.
- Consider engaging a Tenant Representative to search and negotiate on your behalf.

## CHAPTER 9

# THE LEASE SIGNING IS NEXT WEEK!

**W**ithout doubt the number one problem for any office fitout is leasing. Specifically, the time it takes for the opposing solicitor's to agree on terms and conditions and get both parties together to sign the documentation.

I have seen very keen tenants pull-out at the last minute due to the landlord's strange antics. I have seen other companies wait over nine months whilst leases are sorted out. And I have seen my client miss out on space due to lack of commitment and someone else has slipped in and leased the premises from under him.

Just like design and office fitout, leasing premises is not something you do every day and when it represents such a large chunk of the business overhead, then it makes sense to be sure about your actions.

The other thing about leases is that they are a long-term commitment so the deal needs to stack up over time.

Once you are happy with your final property selection, you need to:

## FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

- Employ a good commercial solicitor who understands time is important to you.
- Negotiate the final position on price and conditions, ensuring that the deal has been put together correctly and is in line with your requirements.
- Ensure you have a suitable rent-free position or considerable fitout contribution to put towards your office fitout construction costs.
- Should you receive a fitout contribution, see how this affects your overall tax position and does the deal still stack up? Employ a quantity surveyor for expert advice in this area.

It will pay to understand some of the common terms used in the industry.

## **HEADS OF AGREEMENT:**

In a commercial property transaction in Australia, a Heads of Agreement is often known as the Heads of Terms (HOTS). The main purpose of the HOTS is to identify and highlight the requirements of both the Lessor (owner) and the Lessee (tenant) of the property. There are a number of advantages of using concise and comprehensive heads of terms. For instance, both parties will fully understand what they are subject to, thereby reducing misunderstandings from either party. The heads of terms normally contains the following information:

- Details of the owner – Lessor, including the legal entity or company holding the lease, address and Australian Business Number (ABN).



- Details of the tenant – Lessee, details of the company, registered address and ABN.
- Directors' details.
- Street address of the commercial property, including the legal description, which may include a floor/suite number.
- Details of the commercial property accurately described in both size m2 and by a plan according to the Property Council Code.
- The rent and outgoings expressed both in m2 and actual amounts that both parties have agreed to.
- The Good and Services Tax (GST) position.
- Rent reviews, the frequency and pattern.
- Options and options notice.
- Make-good, if any.
- Inventory, if any.
- Legal fees and who pays
- The standard lease and which party provides the draft.
- Schedule of condition at the start of the lease.
- Lease commencement date.
- Rent commencement date.
- The payment information.
- Any special conditions.
- Target lease signing or lease commencement date.
- Transaction completion date.

## **MAKE-GOOD CLAUSE:**

One of the standard inclusions in an offer to lease, after the commercial terms such as rent and term, is a vague requirement

## FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

for the tenant to make-good the premises at the end of the term. This is detailed in the lease and usually at a minimum requires the tenant to return the premises to the condition it was in at the commencement of the lease, remove its property and leave the premises clean and tidy.

If a lease does not contain any provision, a tenant would be required to comply with its legal obligations as described in the lease, which require a tenant to return the premises to a similar state as it was in at the commencement of the lease, except for fair wear and tear. If a tenant breaches this legal obligation, the landlord can sue the tenant for any loss it has suffered as a result of the tenant's failure.

A way to ensure a fair settlement at the conclusion of your lease is to ensure that you prepare a 'Schedule of Condition' being a full report on the condition of the existing premises before you take occupancy. This should include a marked-up floor plan defining any problems with the existing tenancy, for example water marks on the ceiling or cracked floor tiles, condition of carpets: basically all faults you identified prior to taking occupancy need to be detailed in your report. Good photos are a must, so take plenty, they will save you money at the end of your lease.

## **FITOUT CONTRIBUTION:**

The landlord (Lessor) will offer to pay a certain amount towards partitioning, amenities upgrades, air conditioning etc., which is defined as a dollar amount and can only be spent on the nominated items which usually are in the ownership of the Lessor until the end of the lease (for depreciation reasons).

Note: Even though the Lessor owns them, the tenant has the liability of removing them at the end of the term and redecorating.

## **RENT-FREE PERIOD:**

As the term implies, the incentive is expressed for example, as 'six months' rent-free at the commencement' or 'rent relief per month over the term to the value of six months' rent-free' or a combination of both.

The amount of incentive in Sydney varies between five to thirty per cent of the aggregate value (all the years added) of the lease. It varies for different markets.

A simple illustration would be – initial rent \$200,000 per annum (gross) for a five-year lease (\$1,000,000 aggregate value). An incentive of 15 per cent therefore equates to \$150,000 to be taken as a fitout contribution or a rent-free period. \$200,000 p.a. = \$16,666 per month, therefore \$150,000 = nine months rent-free.

In practice the calculation of incentives can prove as complex as rent reviews over the lease and the time value of money are taken into consideration.

## **BUILDING MANAGER:**

The building manager is responsible for managing the property that is available for lease, by maintaining and handling all the day-to-day activities that are centred around that piece of real estate. Property management may also involve seeking out tenants to occupy the space, collecting monthly rental

FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

payments, maintaining the property and upkeep of the grounds. Apartment complexes are normally handled by some type of property management company.

A typical Heads of Agreement sample would look like this:

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4<sup>th</sup> July 2013

Email:

**RE: HEADS OF TERMS, NEW LEASE**

We refer to our recent discussions and enclose a **Summary** of the terms for the grant of a new lease. This offer is subject to the Lessor's final approval.

---

1	Premises	
2	Lessor	ABN:
3	Lessee	ABN:
4	Permitted use	
5	Base rent	
6	Outgoings	
7	Rent reviews	
8	Term	
9	Options	
10	Lease commencement date	

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CHAPTER 9: THE LEASE SIGNING IS NEXT WEEK!

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11 Rent commencement date	
12 Area	
13 Holding over	
14 Redecoration	
15 Security	
16 Insurance	
17 Legal fees	
18 The lease	
19 GST	
20 Confidentiality	
21 Subject to contract	
22 Lessees solicitor	To be advised
Lessors solicitor	To be advised
23 Special conditions	

---

Should you accept the terms proposed, please sign below where indicated.

Please note that the signing of this letter forms a commercial agreement of fundamental terms of the lease and upon receipt will form the basis of instructions to prepare the new lease document.

We look forward to hearing from you.

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## **SUMMARY**

- Leasing is a complex area where you'll need professional services.
- Understand the glossary.
- Make sure a competent solicitor explains your obligations in plain English.

## CHAPTER 10

# THAT LOOKS GOOD, GIVE ME ONE OF THEM

**H**ave you ever walked into an office and just thought, ‘Wow how good does this office look? I would really like to work here.’

That should be the mindset you have when starting the design process.

### **MAKING THE RIGHT DESIGN CHOICES FOR YOUR TEAM**

I see many offices of all different styles and finishes, layouts and furniture. Some look fantastic and make very clever use of the space, and some add character to the business by introducing either great colours or finishes that immediately make an impression. Sometimes there are fun facilities like a company breakout area that might have a pool table, ping-pong table or an *Xbox* to amuse staff, plus build team spirit.

Other offices have been specifically designed so you can take in the awesome outside views.

I recall a premises I went to visit in North Sydney, Australia. From street level I thought it looked an old, pretty nasty looking building. The lift arrived at level four and the doors opened and ‘WOW’ what a view. It was a crystal clear Sydney morning in May and the harbour views from this building were spectacular. Straight away I could take in the *Opera House* framed by the *Harbour Bridge*; the water was just sparkling and the city was shining with the sun’s rays. The building’s full-length exterior windows really took advantage of the awesome harbour view. Yes I could work here.

Now of course we can’t all have harbour views but there are other ways to create great spaces. I have seen other premises with balconies where the designer had installed a barbeque, a gas heater and a funky outdoor setting, added some feature lights, nice cushions and a timber screen to build a great area for staff and casual client meetings. It really worked well for that particular business and this is what you need to think about. What will work best for your business?

Over the next several chapters let’s build a path for you to follow in your design process thinking that will explain the steps to getting what you want.

Areas we will cover include:

- Choosing a designer that suits you.
- Working to a construction budget.
- Time frames for design.
- Spatial layouts.
- Service consultants.
- Schedule of finishes.
- Compliance to Build Code of Australia (BCA) and Disability Discrimination Act.



## **SO WHAT DESIGNER WILL SUIT YOU?**

Firstly, let's get a definition of whom we are talking about here, because you will come across this same question in your search to find someone to work with. When I say the word 'designer' I mean all the professionals that work in this area of office design. Be it architects, interior designers, draftsmen/draftswomen, engineers and more.

## **WHAT A DESIGNER ISN'T**

I don't mean a colour consultant or decorator. These guys are great at colour but they don't provide the full services that you get from a designer. (For example, a designer also knows whether your building has the required load-bearing specifications for that storage compactus you want.)

You are looking for someone to provide you with a design service to suit your needs. A good designer will advise on many areas including business branding and how you want your new premises to look and feel, the impression your clients and your staff will get when they walk in the front door. A good designer will draw from you all the elements that you want your business premises to be.

They will also understand designing with regard to Work, Health and Safety, building regulations and Disability Discrimination Act compliance. A good design has a number of benefits you've not even thought of – like reduced absenteeism and sick days – productivity will be boosted.

It's the designer's job also to expand your wish list – you know the one you started back in the detailed thinking stage.

## FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

They will take your detailed list and provide specific products and finishes that may be functional, trendy, environmentally friendly, look great, useful or just off the planet amazing if you give them enough design rope.

Designers also understand building – or they should. There's no point in designing something that your building can't cope with. For example how services are reticulated throughout the premises, or when a load-bearing structure is required and when it is not.

## **SO WHAT TYPE OF DESIGNER WILL YOU NEED?**

Like everything, there are advantages and disadvantages of using particular types of businesses to undertake your design. Let me explain.

In the past I have worked with architects – one-man bands and large 100+ employees architectural firms and of course those mid-way firms with between five – twenty employees, all of which have their pros and cons.

## **HORSES FOR COURSES**

One of the best projects I have ever been involved with, was when my client engaged a top notch firm to work with us in a Design and Construct (D&C) project where the time frames were very tight. It was a real team effort to get this project complete. They chose the large firm because of the firepower that they could bring to the project: a senior project architect responsible

for checking all the work that his staff produced, along with a young but experienced architect who was responsible for driving the development of working drawings and getting them to us on-site. She had a team of draftspeople working under her. They had firepower but the job demanded it because we were basically building what they were designing the next day. Sometimes we were waiting on-site to get the next design so we could continue... no joking, it was really like that.

Because you are reading this book, you now know to allow yourself a bit more time! And maybe you're not building a \$1.2 million fitout with \$50,000 plus, in architect's fees. Who should you use?

Your options include smaller firms or maybe a one-man band. If you're thinking a smaller company means less fees and more personal service... that is sometimes the case and sometimes not.

## **GOOGLE IS YOUR FRIEND**

My advice is to do your homework when looking for the designer of your new premises – there is always plenty of information on the web about any designer. Look at jobs they have designed, awards they have won, and people they have worked with. It's all there but what you really want to know is how they will work with you and do they completely understand what it is that you want.

Discuss your needs with your chosen shortlist of designers (no more than three) and ask them to provide a detailed fee structure to complete the works you have defined in your initial game plan. Once you have received their offers you can then analyse the proposals to lead you to a final decision.

**PRO TIP:** During your evaluation look carefully at the inclusions and exclusions. Have they incorporated your requirements? Review the fee structure, think about their different personalities and consider which one would work best with you.

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Your other option is through your builder. Most fitout companies offer a Design & Construct (D&C) service where the builder engages a designer on the client's behalf to work as part of the project team. The designer could be an in-house person or they could be a contractor with the building company.

I personally offer both facilities to our clients depending on the extent of the work and the current work level within my company. Smaller, simple layouts we will handle internally. With more detailed and involved design I recommend one of several designers we have worked with on past projects. This cuts out the need for you to source a designer if you are comfortable with the D&C method of building.

Advantages of the D&C method are that you have a one-stop shop with one point of contact. Having the builder involved together with the designer, can control the costs a bit better, especially if you have provided your preferred construction budget range.

**PRO TIP:** Most people don't really want to tell builders and designers what the budget is. I think this is because they think saying \$250,000 means the builder will come back with exactly that figure and they may have got it cheaper. The client may have no real idea of what it's going to cost because they have not done any homework to this point. This is where they find out if they can afford to do the fitout, but it's a bit late if they have already leased the building.

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In my mind, this is a dangerous game to play because within the process of design and construct, the design in particular can be adjusted to suit your budget. I have in the past not asked clients what their budget was and delivered excellent proposals, only to find out that I was double the cost of what they were budgeting. That's not only a surprise to them but also to me and I may have spent a good 10–20 hours preparing my proposal. On the other hand, I have delivered proposals where I have had absolute dumbfounded faces across from me. I sat there thinking this is either going to be really bad or really good. Fortunately for me it was really good and our cost structure was suitable and in line with what they were thinking.

## **SUMMARY**

- Aim for the ‘Wow’ factor with your design.
- What do your team and your customers expect?
- Choose a proper designer who has all the skills you need, not just a few.
- A good designer will take a holistic approach.
- A D&C approach can help with your budgeting.
- Consider telling your builder the budget – there’s a lot of room in terms of finishes within which to move.

# CHAPTER 11

## DESIGN TO A CONSTRUCTION BUDGET

It's very important at the outset of your relationship with your chosen designer to agree on the construction budget.

But how do you know the costs? You have not completed an office fitout before. Where do you start?

A typical scenario: the property leasing agent said about \$600 m<sup>2</sup>, yet the three builders you speak to give prices ranging from \$800 m<sup>2</sup> to \$2,200 m<sup>2</sup> and a couple of designers started at \$1,500 m<sup>2</sup> up to \$2,400 m<sup>2</sup>. So who is telling the truth and how do you really know what this is going to cost?

That's the question I always get asked and it really becomes a bit of a chicken and egg situation. Which comes first? The design, so it can be priced exactly? Or the budget, so you can design to the anticipated and required cost? Tricky.

## **SO WHAT IS THE ANSWER?**

Well I like to see the site that the client currently is in, to gauge the level of fitout that they are used to – I evaluate if there is anything they can salvage and bring across to the new premises, and I get a feel for how they work at the moment.

I then have a look at the new site to assess any unique building elements such as bad access into the building, extra tall ceiling heights, painted ceiling grid and ceiling tiles (keep away from these if you can), existing services such as air conditioning and fire services, condition of carpets and switchboard capacity.

Finally, I have a conversation around what they are expecting from their new premises. What is on their wish list? You know, the wish list you started to write down when you were big picture thinking. What are the key outcomes they want to achieve? Is it larger functional workstations for all the staff or soundproof meeting rooms for confidential client meetings? Maybe it's a 'knock your socks off' reception area to impress clients and make a corporate statement. Whatever it might be I need to know, because all of these things will affect the budget.

Once I can develop this picture I then review recent projects that fall within a similar level of finish and area of space. I use this to define an approximate m2 rate and "wha-la" you have a budget to work from.



**PRO TIP:** You should always allow a contingency sum in your budgeting procedure for all those unknown items that will pop up. I think 10 per cent is a reasonable amount. Depending on how much homework you have done in your planning process, you may want to allow a bit more, if your current thinking is not that exact.

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Just because you have a contingency, does not mean you have to spend it. It is rainy day money just in case something comes up that would make a significant impact on the business in a positive sense.

## **SO WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT THE DESIGNER KNOWS THE BUDGET FOR CONSTRUCTION?**

Because without a budget they will apply all their skills and design an absolutely fantastic fitout for the space you have leased. They will plan for the very best finishes available: stone reception desktops; solid timber cladding feature walls; top of the line workstations for everyone (multiply that by 40 people and you get a surprise); soundproof glass and slab to slab walls for optimum silence within the meeting rooms. Plus \$1,000 chairs for all and top of the line appliances for your staff kitchen including a \$4,500 dishwasher. Yes, it's very easy to spend up big if the budget has no restraints.

Designers spend a lot of time reviewing new products and are constantly bombarded with manufacturers wanting to sell their goods.

## FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

They usually have large libraries of available products that they can choose from and will tailor your design to meet your budget.

With such a wide range of choice designers can provide all sorts of options and knowing the budget lets them opt for different manufacturers and models to suit the client's brief.

Knowing the level of finish and the areas where the client wants to create the most impact is essential. A clever designer can introduce costly finishes to these impact areas and suggest a lower level of finish to other spaces within the fitout.

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**PRO TIP:** Areas that can get out of hand would include spending on furniture such as high-end chairs and workstations plus all the workstation accessories. Audiovisual can also get out of hand quickly along with light fittings.

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## **SUMMARY**

- Give your designer the budget.
- If you're inexperienced with construction, allow for a 10 per cent contingency.
- Tell your designer where you want impact and where it's not so important – they will tailor the design impact to suit and make sure it's all within budget.

## CHAPTER 12

# HOW LONG DOES DESIGN TAKE?

**H**ow long will the design take? It really depends on you, the designer and anyone else who has a stake in the final design. It also depends on the level of detail you are seeking and the extent of finishes and intricacy of the design.

### SET PARAMETERS

One thing I can tell you is that you need to set parameters with the designer on how long you want it to take, to ensure that there is adequate time remaining to build the project and relocate within an acceptable time frame.

Here's a classic example of what I mean. I have a client for whom we have completed four other fitouts and who have a nice but fairly simple design concept that suits their style of business. They were looking to develop a new, slightly upmarket, style of store without increasing the overall cost of the fitout too much and we were approaching it as a design and construct concept.

## **TOO MANY COOKS...**

We had our designer on board but discussions started a bit later than they should have, in that they had a June 30 deadline and we were discussing this job in mid-April. We also had to seek design approval from another stakeholder – *Westfield*. *Westfield* have their own team of professional building managers and tenancy designers who provide significant input on how your shop can be built and have an approval processes that must be followed.

On top of that my client had just appointed a new Managing Director, another stakeholder who was also the person who approved design and budget.

So how did it turn out? We submitted a draft plan based on the initial client discussion and then changed a few items. It went back to the client who was happy and they sent it onto *Westfield*. They red penned it, as they wanted to see more finishes and fittings, more ‘wow’ factor. This added additional cost to the budget, and thus it needed it to be redesigned. New plans were produced and run past the Managing Director who then wanted to move the position of reception desk. Believe it or not, *Westfield* then made further changes and so more plans... it can be a very back and forth process.

So it was early June and the end result is that we had 13 days to fitout new premises for our client. We had to get it done because they had already surrendered their lease on their existing premises.

## THE NEED IS REAL

So you can see the need to place time frames on design. It is critical to start the design process early, set target dates, ensure that decisions are made on design and that all stakeholders are happy with the outcome and, maybe importantly, are also aware of the time restraints.

Other stakeholders you may also have to get approval from depending on your circumstances, include:

- Other section managers within your business  
e.g., marketing regarding signage.
- Building management (in the above case it was *Westfield*)  
but in your case it will be the owner of the property or  
maybe the strata committee if your premises is a strata.
- Council, if seeking a Development Application (DA).
- Private Certifying Authority (PCA) who may need to  
review plans to ensure they all meet relevant codes  
(remember before any building can start these guys need  
two days prior notice to inspect the site).

So you can see how easy it might be to burn time so to speak within the entire design process and development of plans to suit your business needs.

## PLAN SO YOU HAVE SUFFICIENT TIME

So what else can extend the time it takes to design your office? The level of detail required to convey the design elements

to a point where you the client can understand them and be comfortable with what you are receiving.

Everyone's capacity to understand a plan is different. Some people can just look at a plan and understand intuitively how it's going to look when finished. Others can't. These people will need all the tricks that a great designer can bring to the table to make the design come alive for everyone. This may include rendered three-dimensional drawings, detailed elevations, modelling or even a computer generated walk-through design.

## **DESIGN ISN'T UNDERSTOOD BY EVERYONE**

A very simple example of this is my family home. We recently decided to purchase a new house and because I build offices for a living I was happy to engage someone who builds homes for a living, because I do what I do and they do what they do. Problem was my wife Alison and I had never been down this path before. We went on a road of discovery, not only about the process of building a new home, but about the differences between us, that we had not discovered after 15 years of marriage.

I'm the guy who can look at plans and go yeah, that will be great I can picture that. Years of experience will do that for you. Alison struggled, no matter how (badly) I tried to explain it.

I really wanted to run with a local builder and construct a one of a kind custom home that was planned to suit our needs. But in the end we went with a project homebuilder where we could walk through the home we were about to build and actually see and feel how the home was going to be.

For me it was a personal learning curve and although it was frustrating to some extent, I had to acknowledge it wasn't that simple. In the end we didn't go the custom design route because it was causing too much pain.

The learning I took away was that not everyone sees things the way I do, and so it is with design. Some people will need more detail than others; some people will need more explanation than others. Some people may never get enough information. At some point you may just need to get them to where they are 90 per cent okay and just run with it.

That said, the stakeholder's ability to grasp the design is a key denominator in reducing the time it will take to design your new office. The less explaining you need to do because of good design tools, the better.

## **SUMMARY**

- Establish time deadlines for your designer.
- Manage the various stakeholders with a firm hand.
- Understand who all the stakeholders are.
- Planning will help you leave sufficient time.
- Make sure your designers use all the tools available to communicate their design in a way that all stakeholders can understand.





# CHAPTER 13

## WHY DID YOU PUT THAT THERE?

In my mind there are two things that we want our designers to deliver day in, day out and that is great space planning and wonderfully combined finishes and fittings.

In this chapter we are going to discuss Space Planning, technically known as spatial requirements.

### HOW IS IT ALL GOING TO FIT?

When leasing floor space, one of the first things that come to mind, is how am I going to fit everything in? Will we be able to successfully operate from this space and how do I ensure we can?

Get involved with a great designer is my answer!

A designer will be able to take your written and verbal briefings and add them to a copy of the proposed floor plan to create a variety of layouts that will work for your particular circumstances.

## FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

Typically the designer will conduct a detailed consultation review of the premises with you, provide advice, create the scope and then provide direction for the project design.

## **THE PROCESS WORKS**

Some designers will provide a return brief which will fully describe the scope of the work, possibly comment about budget and then add their thoughts and understanding from the initial meeting.

You may be required to sign and send that return brief back to the designer, defining clear agreement with the designer on the budget for design and construction, time frame and design direction.

By doing so, you're now agreeing that the designer's guidelines are what you are seeking to develop and ultimately build as your new business premises.

Once the design guidelines are agreed, the designer will attend site to undertake a full check measure of the area to be constructed. This aids in providing accurate plans and helps reduce the risk of being short on space when it comes to building the walls and fitting furniture.

**PRO TIP:** Always, always, always, get a site measurement completed, as I cannot tell you how many times we have started a project and on the very first day stopped work within the first hour because the plans are wrong. So often designers will take the plans they receive by email, fax or hard copy as being correct only to find they're not and the consequent design now needs surgery urgently.

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Don't believe me? It happens so often it's almost normal. Remember why you are reading this book... to avoid the rookie mistakes. Pay the money – get it measured up to save a headache later.

## **LOOK FOR A DRAFT**

Typically after a designer has taken your brief they will develop a draft floor plan for your review before proceeding to construction drawings.

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**PRO TIP:** If you think you need a few sessions with the designer to really nail down the design concept, be sure to check the fine print in their design fee structure to ensure it clearly states how many visits are allowed at each stage of the design process.

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## **THE PAY-OFF**

A well-designed layout will guarantee you a functional space with the greatest possible return on investment on every square metre of area.

### **SUMMARY**

- Don't accept previous plans and measurements of your new space – have it measured again professionally.
- Getting the process right and following it from the beginning will save you headaches in the long run.

## CHAPTER 14

# GREAT COLOUR, FINISHES AND LIGHTING

Once walked into a serviced office in Parramatta only to be absolutely knocked back by the power and brightness of the colour scheme in this particular office. Let me paint the picture... the floor comprised a number of offices, all with full height plasterboard walls and full height, narrow MDF doors, so there were lots of walls and lots of doors.

No big deal, that's how most offices might look right? The problem was the colour selections. Think of the two most common colours of the late 1990s and you might say purple and lime green. In this case the designer had chosen the most eye burning level of these two colours possible – purple walls and lime green doors to the max. It was powerful but overpowering. I couldn't believe these rooms would be used for business premises. They were so very bright and just 'butt ugly'.

## **COLOUR REFLECTS WHO YOU ARE**

These offices were going to be used as serviced offices for new start-up businesses, companies looking for inspiration to burst into their full potential, a place of thinking and work focus.

No way. I can tell you, as would nearly anyone working in that premises – **WRONG COLOURS**.

Now don't get me wrong, I am certainly no interior designer or colour consultant. Nor do I have an eye for art. Matter of fact when most clients ask me what do I think they should run with, I turn the question around by saying it's your office, you're going to live here, what do you really like?

In the end it's what you like that matters. If I see something on paper that might be a bit bold or overpowering I will comment, but in the end it's your office.

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**PRO TIP:** I am a big fan of feature colours but I'm not a big fan of making every second wall a feature colour unless there is a specific reason for it e.g., to identify meeting rooms or to set the mood in an interview room, displaying corporate colours for marketing purposes and the like. Use the 'more is less principle' to get maximum 'wow' factor.

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## **MATERIALS ARE A GREAT WAY TO LOOK DIFFERENT**

Aside from paint colours there are an endless amount of other finishes that can be applied throughout the premises. From natural products like stone, wood, steel, aluminium and timber through to equivalent man-made products.

The use of feature finishes provides impact to your final design and also double as soundproofing or a resilient finish for a lot of foot traffic.

## **'WOW' IS GOOD**

If you want some 'wow' in your office you need to start thinking about what you like and why. Then start looking for examples you can discuss with your designer. Magazines or websites are full of designer finishes and many are useful for getting specification sheets direct from the suppliers.

The more information you can provide your designer the better they can see which way you are leaning on finishes and fittings.

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**PRO TIP:** Natural products are exactly that, natural. It's what makes them one of a kind, beautiful and rich in colour, sometimes expensive always varying in level of quality and sometimes size. You need to be aware that the colour of the product shown in the magazine or online or even as a sample in a showroom, may not always be the same as that delivered to your office.

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## **NATURAL MATERIAL VARIATIONS**

I have seen many clients become completely frustrated at the difference in colour of the product they receive compared to the one in the showroom. This generally only occurs with natural products and is part of their unique allure I think.

You could take this up with the supplier, but it won't end well unless you have a chalk and cheese example. What you'll hear mostly is 'Sorry mate it's a natural product'.

The other interesting aspect of natural products is that sometimes the product is not as hard-wearing or maintenance-free as the man-made alternative. Let me give you an example.

## **NATURAL PRODUCTS NEED MAINTENANCE**

We once installed a natural stone tile in a reception area that cost the client a lot of money. It was difficult to lay but the installer did a terrific job, provided a clear protective finish over the newly laid tiles and followed the manufacturer's details to the letter. Eight months after handover I returned to the client's premises for a follow-up visit. Whilst I was waiting at reception, I noticed a very large stain in the natural stone, in full view of everyone entering the premises. I knew it was not part of the natural product and so I asked the question of the receptionist. "Hi, I really like these floor tiles they look good, but what happened?" She replied, "Yes, someone dropped a coffee and stained it. They're a natural product."

Natural products do need more maintenance than other products. Even though we had applied the correct level of



protective finish, it was only guaranteed for six months and a new coating should have been reapplied to maintain integrity. Be aware of these potential problems when choosing natural products. Think about the maintenance and what is involved before committing to the design specifications.

## **LIGHTING ADDS A LOT**

Let's talk lighting. It's a critical element of design and one that can really give you a 'wow' factor in so many ways. It can provide big, bold brightness to a space that says 'Here We Are' as soon as you step out of the lift. If you have walked into a space you just know is different, chances are it was the lighting. It can also have the opposite effect and provide a subtle low level of light when required. (Perhaps in an office where the mood needs to be calm and conversations kept at a low level or an interview room or sometimes a reception area.)

Lighting also needs to be practical. There needs to be sufficient light to see and complete your day-to-day tasks. If it can do that in a way that is also stylish and adds impact to your premises then all the better.

Some designers will rely on specialist lighting consultants to provide the effects you are wanting, which will mean an additional fee. Depending on budget, if lights are something you're concerned about, then the cost will be money well spent. The specialists stay up-to-date on everything to do with lights, they can design to achieve specific lux levels and they have all the latest technology and fittings on tap. They will often provide designs that save you money in the long run by choosing energy efficient fittings and globes.

A specialist light consultant will take the designer's plans and provide marked-up suggestions on how to get more from your premises through clever selection of fittings. They will define exactly where the fittings should be placed and offer suggestions on how to switch the lights.

## **SUMMARY**

- Colour choice needs a professional.
- Don't be afraid to speak your mind if the colours are... bold.
- Don't go overboard with the endless choices of colours and materials – it can look messy.
- Natural materials will vary from the samples you made your decision on.
- Lighting adds a lot to your design impact.
- If your premises has special needs, consider a lighting specialist who may even save you money over the longer-term.

# CHAPTER 15

## TO COMPLY OR NOT TO COMPLY?

One of the first questions new clients ask when I attend a site inspection is what do we need to do to comply and is there a need to run the project through council?

I really understand this question because I think it's one of those grey areas in building. A better way to describe it, is that it's one of those confusing areas.

### **HERE ARE THREE ITEMS TO CONSIDER:**

1. Most office fitout work is of a non-structural kind. Rarely do we remove or install load-bearing walls or build anything of a truly structural nature.
2. Typically any kind of council certification process will delay the commencement of a project as there needs to be time allowed to put in place the necessary advice to council, and then gain approvals to proceed.
3. At a minimum the council process will add \$5,000 to your bottom line budget.

## **FIVE SCENARIOS WHERE YOU SHOULD SEEK APPROVAL:**

1. To ensure your new premises are constructed to meet the Building Code of Australia (BCA) and Access to Premises Building Standards and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).
2. It's probably company policy.
3. Your insurance and finance company will insist.
4. To avoid claims later by employees or clients for not providing facilities to BCA or the Disability Discrimination Act.
5. If your landlord tells you that you must.

## **SO SHOULD YOU SEEK APPROVAL?**

It's one of those common sense questions and depends upon which of the elements listed above apply to your circumstances. I have seen a swing in the last three years to gaining compliance more often than not and it's now almost an expected part of the process.

## **SO HOW DO YOU GET A COMPLIANT OFFICE FITOUT?**

There are two typical processes to follow:

1. Compliance under standard council application for Development Application (DA), followed by Construction Certificate (CC)
2. Compliance by Compliant Development Certificate (CDC) followed by Occupation Certificate (OC)

Process Number 1 is where you submit a DA to council and there may be many reasons for doing so. For example:

- You are moving into brand new premises and are the first tenant in that space. Council need to know what type of business you are setting up and whether it complies with the council's Development Control Procedures (DCP).
- You are moving your business into an older building, however it's not the same type of business that was operating from that premises before. Council want to know what type of business you are operating and therefore whether the area is zoned for it. For example, an accountant used to occupy the premises but you are proposing a veterinary surgery there.

Process Number 2 is more straightforward, and always the faster processing option as long as the premises and your business match up.

## **SECTION 149 CERTIFICATE**

What do I mean? The premises will have been registered with council at some point. You can source from council a Section 149 certificate that states the local council's allowances for business trading from that particular address. If your business is clarified under the Section 149 certificate there will not be any problems with processing your building plans via a CDC application. A Section 149 certificate will cost you about \$60 from your local council.

This means that you can engage a Private Certifying Authority (PCA) to work on your behalf. A PCA's role is basically to report to the council the details of the project and also authorise the works under their guidance for and on behalf of the council. It is the PCA's role to ensure all the elements of construction at your new premises are undertaken in accordance with the BCA Building Code of Australia and all the other necessary codes, and in particular codes relating to disabled access within the work environment.

On completion of works and inspection of the same, the PCA will then provide a certificate of occupancy, allowing the new tenant to fully occupy the premises and commence trading.

## **THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW**

The PCA (and to a lesser extent the council) will need detailed drawings for the approval process defining the specific works to be undertaken. Typically they will need:

- Site plan.
- Floor plan – defining the construction area and rooms to be built, including all doorways, path of egress out of building and must also show fire escapes.
- Service drawings showing fire services, air conditioning services, emergency and exit signs, plumbing services.
- Finishes plan defining floor coverings and tiled areas.
- Signage and paint colours.

PCA needs all the relevant information so that they can define whether your proposal will meet the standards required. Without good documentation they cannot do this, which is why they insist on it.

## **THE PCA IS RESPONSIBLE**

Once a PCA signs off your building for occupation, they are basically saying that the building at that point in time complies with Australian building standards and all relevant codes. Should something not actually meet the codes and standards, then the PCA is liable because they have signed off on it. This is why you will find they are very precise and require exact information before processing any application.

You must understand that the PCA has strict standards that they must abide by in everything they do. Otherwise they face restrictions in trading or can be barred completely from carrying out their business.

It's not possible to start demolition or construction on-site until the PCA has inspected the premises. They need a minimum notice of two days in order to visit the site and provide the CDC to commence work. Failing to provide this time to the certifier

may result in non-compliance and they will be unable to provide the certification you need to occupy the premises.

Fee structures for PCA services will differ depending on the size of the project. In my experience most fee structures for PCA services are much the same from each provider. They don't differ significantly from company to company.

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**PRO TIP:** Council fees and long service levy payments do not form a part of the PCA fees for service and will always be charged as an additional cost.

The approval process will differ in each state of Australia – the information above is New South Wales (NSW) law. Before proceeding always check with the local council in the state you are proposing to build in. Ensure that any consultants you engage are also licensed and insured to perform work in the same state that you are building in.

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## **SUMMARY**

- Your building will likely need council approval.
- The two most common forms of council approval are standard Council DA or Compliance by CDC.
- CDC is the most straightforward and is provided by a Private Certifying Authority.
- A private certifying authority will require full details of your project.



# CHAPTER 16

## SERVICE CONSULTANTS

### Why You Need Them

**H**ave you worked in an office environment where the temperature was always a bit hot and everyone agreed with you? But, over in Accounts, Julie says it's too cold?

How can that be possible?

Some will say, oh that's the difference between women and men. (It's not.)

- Have you ever wondered why when you close the door in your office the ceiling tiles pop up out of the ceiling grid for a brief second, make a wind like noise and then pop back down again?
- Do you wonder why it's so bloody dark in here and why the lights don't provide enough light level to really see what I'm doing?
- Ever thought the data cabling in the back of your rack, linking into all the patch panels, looks like an eagles nest made of data cables?
- Why does the hot water take a year (or at least five minutes) to reach your sink?

## FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

- How come one area of the office has lots of fire sprinklers yet some areas have none?
- Why is the fire exit sign positioned, so that if you followed it, you would end up walking into a blank wall?

I could go on forever but here is the thing – you need service consultants to avoid all of the above real life circumstances I've come across.

## **THEY PAY-OFF IN THE END**

Service consultants are trained in the design and documentation of the particular building service in which they have studied. They are responsible for delivering specific project documentation that will enhance the design and functionality of the overall design and ensure that the end result is one that complies with all standards and provides optimum performance for the end user.

By engaging a service engineer you can be assured that the services side of your building will be delivered to a high standard.

## **HELPS COMPARISON OF QUOTES**

By engaging an engineer, the 'grey area' of what is included and what is not included in the service tender does not exist because the project is clearly defined. Tradespeople will use specific information on the plans to provide quotations that enable the client to compare 'apples with apples'.

By engaging an engineer you will receive a system designed for your specific needs, with the outcomes you are aiming for. Whether that is a specific light level needed for training people; a required working air temperature; specific exhaust extraction from your chemical lab – whatever your particular needs – engineers will sort out the areas that seem to be complicated.

Service engineers are great for specific industry requirements where there are many and varied codes to meet. For example, the food processing industry has requirements around the condition of the premises and the need to keep them clean, at set temperatures, even controlled environments where there is the need for overalls and hairnets due to contamination risks. Service engineers can really shine for you and provide the key detailed information you need.

## **HOW TO SPOT OVER-ENGINEERING**

I have seen some over-engineering of services. Now the engineers in the world might say it's better to be over than under and this is correct, especially when building a bridge, skyscraper or tunnel. But there is no need for air conditioning that will cool an area double the capacity of the space you are about to lease. Tell the engineer exactly what it is that you are trying to achieve, for what reason and to what budget and they will generally deliver.

How will you know if the engineer has really beefed up the design? The short answer is YOU won't. You're not a technical person like your engineer so until you go to market and get pricing on the developed plans you won't know. However, once you receive several quotes, if you notice more often than not the

tradespeople are asking questions like why that size unit or why those lights, then perhaps you have a problem.

## **TRADESMEN CAN BE A GREAT RESOURCE**

As you will find out during your building journey there are always multiple solutions to fixing a problem. There are times when the tradesmen will come back to you with alternative solutions to the designed documentation. You should take notice of this advice because these guys are at the coalface every day doing this sort of work. They're very good at working out what works and what doesn't because they're the ones who return to site to fix the problem.

Another common thing I see with engineering diagrams is the cost factor between alternatives. For example Light-Emitting Diode (LED) light fittings vary in cost considerably and usually this is because they come from different manufacturers with different outcomes, warranties etc. When you are lighting an entire floor with, say, 160 light fittings at a saving of between \$100 and \$150 per light then you're talking serious money. This would equate to between \$16,000–\$24,000 – which will come in handy, believe me. Don't be scared to ask for alternatives from your engineer. We would all like to drive the *Ferrari* but most of us still drive the *Toyota*.

The upshot is you need to listen to all the advice and come to your own conclusions. I'm not anti-engineer and the ideas that these guys come up with are usually outstanding and make the project very easy because of the significant detail they provide. The specified products are usually excellent and the end result will be a first-class office premises.

**PRO TIP:** The initial spend to engage an engineer can be significant, but it is an upfront cost that you will recoup many times over.

Here is a list of Service Consultants you will mostly come across:

- Mechanical Engineer – responsible for the design and documentation of air conditioning services including exhaust and any other specific extraction and cooling and heating systems.
  - Fire Engineer – responsible for the design and documentation of the fire services to the specific project and includes fixed fire sprinkler system, detection systems, extinguishers, suppressant gases and any other form of fire control.
  - Electrical Engineer – responsible for the design and documentation of all the electrical services for the specific project including lighting, power points, switchboard services and any specific project-related energy requirements. Data cabling could also fall under the electrical engineer's scope.
  - Access Consultants – responsible for the design and documentation of specific access, and in particular are experts on disability access codes.
-

## **SUMMARY**

- Service consultants are a worthwhile investment.
- They will ensure you comply with complex rules and regulations.
- Service engineers are specialists who enable a more productive and appropriate environment.
- Over-engineering is rare but your tradespeople will alert you to it.
- Listen to your tradies – they often have cheaper alternatives or suggestions.

## CHAPTER 17

# HOW TO CHOOSE A BUILDER

**Q**uotations, Quotes, Proposal, Investment, Paperwork – whatever the builder calls it, what you’re after is the cost. How much will it cost to build my new business premises, and second, why should I pick you for the job?

I recently built a new family home and because I am not involved with the domestic building industry day in and day out, we as a family, decided that the best person to build our new home would be one of the many homebuilders in our local area.

So this is where the fun began (and in the start it really was fun). We looked at all the show homes, talked to many builders, looked at various plans and started to get an idea of what we wanted.

### **SO MANY QUESTIONS**

Then at some point we had to make a decision on who we were going to build with. There is serious money on the line and who will we be able to work with?

To some extent, it's a leap of faith in that you're putting all your ideas and dreams of what your new home will be in the hands of one company. Would they deliver all the things they've said they would? Will they stick to the cost? Will they give us ridiculous variations? Will they be finished in time and will they deliver great quality?

You should be thinking much the same when looking for a builder to construct your new business premises.

It's not an easy decision because there are important items on the line, like how will the business operate if the builder you choose bombs out? What if they are really difficult to work with, never on time with anything, can't be reached on the mobile ever?

You don't want to be in a situation where you need to vacate your existing premises but don't have completed premises to move into. Believe me, it happens.

Your homework on selecting the right builder includes:

- Checking references – whom have they worked for in the past.
- Asking how long the company they are working with has been in business.
- How many staff do they have?
- Talking to the managing director to get a feel for his attitude.
- Looking carefully at their manner when you meet them – did they grasp the project, did they ask questions, were they able to suggest other ideas, did you feel they knew what they were doing?
- Asking yourself, could you work with them?
- Maybe even visiting one of their existing sites and observing how they operate.



Quotations – what you should be looking for in order of importance:

1. The overall figure will immediately show you the range of pricing and you can ascertain if you are on budget, under or over. It's also a quick way to see if all the builders have provided comprehensive pricing as you will see the range of costs from highest to lowest. The smaller the difference the better. If there is only a small variance then it means the project has been properly briefed, usually through a written specification and detailed plans. However, if the price range variation is large then possibly your instructions to quote were not as clear as they should have been. Or the builders have misunderstood your requirements. Either way, you need to take a close look at the quotations to account for the variances.
2. Have they understood what you want? Is everything listed in an easy-to-read format? A good proposal will make sense the first time you read it. It will clearly explain everything that has been included in point form and will have references to the plans and specifications (if you have them) so that you understand exactly what has been allowed for in the quotation.
3. Have they identified individual costs or just provided a lump sum figure for the entire project? As a standard inclusion in all our quotations, we always, always provide a listed quotation trade-by-trade so that our clients can see exactly how much things actually cost. This benefits the client because they can see immediately the cost for specific items. And perhaps if

the budget limit is being pushed, they may decide to drop that Zip boiling/chilled water unit at \$5,000 or that trendy lounge in reception at \$6,700.

Listing also provides a comparison sheet to other quotations and you can quickly see where the differences are. It is not uncommon for certain items to be missed or just left out when quoting a project. For example one builder might provide a comprehensive quotation and the other builder may think that the client was providing all the workstations and chairs through another supplier - that's \$40,000 worth of equipment. If you had received two lump sum quotes with a \$40,000 difference you may be inclined to run with the cheaper builder, without knowing you had to supply the workstations.

The listed quotation also provides an excellent way to spot differences between trade costs. For example you may really feel good about one builder, but when you received his quotation you could identify from the cost breakdown that his electrical and plumbing costs were significantly higher than the other quotes. By doing a trade-by-trade analysis you can go back to the preferred builder and advise him that, based on other quotes, these two trades are high and can he please explain why? The builder won't mind at all, as he knows if you're asking questions then he may well be in line for the job.

There may also be a very logical answer for why his pricing was a bit higher including:

- He may not have had time to get a quote from his tradesman so he estimated the price based on previous jobs.

- He may have doubled up on a particular item.  
For example he may have allowed twice as many light fittings by mistake. (It does happen.)
- He might have thought that a particular part of the works had to be completed outside normal working hours so has allowed for double time (this will always pump up the cost)

Be prepared to discuss your quotation and enable the builder to give you further information, so you can make an informed decision.

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**PRO TIP:** Always ask builders to provide a list of all the items they have allowed for and a list of costs for all trades and suppliers.

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4. The exclusions list. If there isn't one, be concerned, as there will generally be items that are not included. For example, any of the following:
  - Council certification or Private Certifying Authority costs.
  - Works after hours.
  - Particular trades and services, e.g., if you have a nominated supplier (an electrician) then the builder's quote should say 'no allowances for electrical work' just so it's clear.

- As-built drawings (some building owners will ask for these as a part of a fitout) but unless specifically asked for at quoting stage, builders will not allow for them, as the costs increase their overall quotation.

The exclusion list is sometimes just as important as the inclusion list – always be sure to read each point because there may be items you need and they must be budgeted for.

## **CAN YOU ASK FOR REVISED QUOTATIONS?**

It is not uncommon to request a revised quotation – and if you have received quotations that you feel are good but unclear on a couple of items, ask for clarification.

Remember you are the project manager and you need to be able to justify all the financial decisions you are making. If you receive all your quotes and then decide to attack the project in a different way it's not too difficult for the builders to revise their quotations. They have already been to the site and know the job, so unless you have added a significant amount of work to the project then it should be simple to make the changes in costs.

The worst thing you can do is select a builder, based on first quotations without a detailed analysis. You need to be sure that everything is covered. If you get resistance to your line of questioning then be wary as the builder maybe hiding something from you.

**PRO TIP:** Time spent analysing quotations now and gaining full understanding of what has been allowed for, will help you minimise the risk of receiving a lot of variations later. It's very important to select a company that is right for you. All things being equal after reviewing all the quotes and meeting with the builders a second or third time, it really comes down to your gut feeling. Go with it.

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## SUMMARY

- It's a big decision with a lot of variables so get serious about doing your homework.
- Things to do: check references, establish working history, find out how many staff work for them, get a feel for the boss's attitude.
- Quotations, the quick check – is the price OK, have they understood the brief, are the costs broken down, what's included, what's not?
- Ask for breakdown quotes with all the trades and prices listed.
- Assess the quotes, meet the builders, then all other things being equal, go with your gut



## CHAPTER 18

# MY ONE POINT OF CONTACT

**L**et me state right up front so it's very clear – if you want a smooth fit out, you need to request and demand one key person point of contact.

This also has some responsibilities on your part. You need to be disciplined enough to ensure that you advise that one key person of all your decisions throughout the project, rather than saying this or that to the various trades that come through.

### **WHY IT'S NECESSARY**

Let me paint a picture – actually this was kind of the problem... the painter.

I recently completed a small job outside of Sydney, Australia where we were supposed to paint a feature wall. We had marked it on the plan, however once the walls were built, it was obvious that the position was just not right. I contacted the client to discuss the options and because she could not visualise the premises it was decided that we would not proceed with the feature wall but would paint it later. Straightforward thus far.

## FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

Indeed, this is how one key point of contact works – an issue arises; contact made, decision made, project moves forward – simple.

Not quite. About a month later the client has moved in and now wants the feature wall painted. Yes the one behind reception that was the obvious choice a month ago. So the client once again follows the one key person rule and contacts me – perfect this is how it should work.

## **SOUNDS GOOD SO FAR**

We agree to paint the selected wall in the colour and paint we had left on-site. I organise a different painter because the original painter is too busy to paint the wall.

Pretty simple request – we do this every day. Because the site was three hours from Sydney I did not have a supervisor go to the site and check the work – instead I worked on the ‘no news is good news’ principal and assumed it was all good.

Two weeks later I get a call from a very upset client – why had we painted the long wall and not the reception wall?

My initial reaction was confusion. What the... ? No way!

Sure enough, we had painted the wrong wall. Why? Because the one point of contact rule had been broken. Actually not just broken, smashed into a thousand pieces.

The painter had arrived on-site and was preparing to paint the wall but was cut off by the receptionist with new instructions to paint the long wall. Key point of contact rule – broken. The painter should not have taken instructions from the receptionist, no matter how convincing she was.



The painter should have contacted his boss to get a definite instruction – if there was any doubt the painter's boss should have called me.

The receptionist also broke the rule. She should have called head office to ask my client if it was okay to paint the long wall and not make a decision on the spot, just because she thought it would look better. The receptionist was very convincing and had told the painter that it was cleared by head office and it was okay to proceed.

I must say it had been a while since this has happened on one of my projects, but it still happened. Not only must you make sure your one point of contact knows the rule, you must ensure that your sub-trades and employees on both sides also know.

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**PRO TIP:** A builder who uses experienced and long-term trades generally avoids these types of issues. Over time the sub-trades get to know how the builder operates and will not take instructions from clients at any level until completely cleared by the builder.

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So the painter was at fault because he should have stuck to the instructions, and the receptionist had told a white lie because she did not have head office's approval to change the wall.

Result: we had to return to site and paint the reception wall the correct colour and then repaint the long wall back to its original colour.

Why did the wall get changed?

The receptionist did not want to unload files in front of the reception wall. Amazing right?

But I can't tell you how many times people will put words into your mouth and change the progress of a job. We used to have a common saying in my office, 'George said...'

Whenever there was an issue on-site, quite often the client or the subcontractor would use the old, 'George said' line and because I was the boss, well, it must be true. Problem was, sometimes George hadn't actually said anything.

As my business grew larger and responsibility for running projects was passed onto key project managers I had to make it perfectly clear to all that the project manager was the one key point of contact... not me. I also had to be very careful in my conversations with clients and subcontractors that I did not say something that might come back as a 'George said' which would lead to something not being done properly or completed on time.

## **CLEAR COMMUNICATIONS ARE KEY TO SMOOTH BUILDING**

Find out who your key point of contact is with your builder and always make your requests to that person.

**PRO TIP:** Email allows us to keep a great record of he said/she said requests. A good email track always defines who said what and when. If you have a conversation, a phone call or face-to-face meeting that resolves some issues or provides important direction, always follow it up with an email confirming the discussion and the outcome.

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## **SUMMARY**

- The one point of contact rule saves confusion and will save irritating problems from arising.
- If something can go wrong, it will and the one point rule stops most things going wrong.
- Be pedantic in having decision-making conversations only with your one point of contact.
- Confirm all conversations or phone calls with a follow-up email confirming the details.



## CHAPTER 19

# LET'S GET STARTED

**S**o the lease is signed, the builder's quote agreed, contracts signed and you're excited about starting the project. So why isn't it underway?

There are several things that will stop a project before it begins and depending on which building you have leased space in, there are several things you can do to ensure an on time start.

First, the things that STOP a project:

- No power has been connected by the client – just like moving into a new home you must contact the provider so they know where to send the bills.
- No light switches, meaning we could not see what we were doing – if the tenancy has been recently refurbished then light switches might be bundled up in the ceiling, or just cut off as part of the de-fit and someone had not bothered to reinstate them.
- No switchboard – landlord had not installed one. This can sometimes happen during a refurbishment. The landlord may try and pass the cost of this work onto the incoming tenant.

## FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

- No inductions into the building were completed, so we were not allowed onto site. Most CBD managed buildings will have a requirement that the builder and their sub-trades be fully inducted so they know all about the building they are working in. The right things to do in an emergency, level of conduct expected, working hours, parking – if any, and so on.
- No PCA documentation provided to building manager.
- No plans provided to landlord so they are unaware of what is being constructed in their building.
- My personal favourite – too noisy. We forgot to take our quiet hammers and have been stopped from working because we were making too much noise. The tenants below and above were complaining, yet we were never advised that noisy works were required to be performed outside normal hours. In one case we had a court of law directly below us – part of the induction rules were if the court was in session, you could not make any undue noise. It would have been nice to know this at time of quoting.

This list is endless... almost. To avoid disaster make sure you have addressed all of these elements with the building manager, builder and certifier.

## **CHECKLIST**

- Power – is it connected?
- Insurances provided to building owner – Public Liability including maximum coverage limit, Workers Compensation.

- Have smoke detectors been isolated on the floor – what is the process required to make this happen?
- Have site inductions been completed either online or face-to-face?
- What are the preferred times for delivering materials to site and is there a restriction on using the lifts?
- Is there a specific goods lift that must be used?
- Who provides the protective blankets for the lift?
- Have workers health and safety reports been provided to building manager?
- Are there any noisy work restriction times?
- Has parking been arranged on-site?
- Are there toilet facilities available on-site?
- Has a dilapidation report been completed before starting works?

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**PRO TIP:** It's always important to undertake a Dilapidation Report, in other words, a report on the existing site conditions. Typically you would do this for your own records, as at the end of your lease you will need to return the space back to its original condition. By completing this report and providing photographic evidence of same, you know exactly what is required and will avoid any disagreements with the landlord. You should provide a copy of this report to the landlord for their files.

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## **SUMMARY**

- There is a ton of things that will stop a project before it even starts – get to know them.
- Use the checklist to make sure your project can start on time.



## CHAPTER 20

# HAMMERS, GYROCK AND STEEL

 Okay then, you have ticked off the pre-start checklist and we are all clear to go.

*Look out it's hammers, gyprock and steel time*

This is when you get your first delivery of materials and it's usually steel stud and gyprock board, and you will see massive changes to your once open floor plan office as wall frames quickly get constructed.

Wall frames are installed, walls are sheeted, and tradesmen on-site are busy.

It's ACTION Time!

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**PRO TIP:** If you have any reservations about how a particular area of the building is going to look and you're not 100 per cent sure that it's what you want, now is the time to do a site inspection. At this point it is still possible and quite simple to make alterations to the wall frames at minimum and sometimes no cost.

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## FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

Leave it a bit later and you're in trouble. Once the wall frames have been sheeted and services like electrical and plumbing have been roughed in or fitted off – you have an expensive problem.

You now also need to remember that your office is now a building site and so be careful when you enter the site. There will be materials stacked in odd places, plastic on the floor which gets slippery if wet or if not taped down correctly becomes a trip hazard. There will be tradesmen with sharp tools so be safety conscious and follow all signs and directions. Things you can do to have a safe visit are:

- Wear covered shoes.
- Use a high visibility vest.
- Respect that the guys are working and stay clear of the work area.
- Ensure that any staff members abide by the same rules.

Fitout happens quite quickly – generally all materials are available 'off the shelf' so a lot of work can be completed in a short space of time.

## **WHAT'S IMPORTANT?**

The walls are important – they provide the framework for services to be positioned in. They provide the final measurement for joinery to be built. The steel frames in an office fitout are like the concrete foundations of a home. They set out the building and just like a home, if they are not set out correctly then the rest of the project won't run smoothly.

Of course, it is the builder's responsibility to check that everything is in position, however it won't hurt for you to also check things out. Take a floor plan with you and check off the walls as you see them in position on-site.

Directly after the wall frames are in position, the gyprock sheets will be fixed to the frames and services such as electrical and plumbing will go in. If you have any nominated trades like security for instance, then now is the time to get them on-site. Don't delay, the sheets will go up as fast as possible and you don't want to delay the job.

After all the walls are sheeted and plastered they will be sanded.

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**PRO TIP:** Make sure you request your builder vacuums up the plaster dust as soon as sanding finishes. Most of the white plaster dust generally falls directly to the bottom of the wall so collect it now, before it ends up across the entire floor, out in the common areas of the building and into the lifts. You don't need to start off on the wrong foot with your new building manager.

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## **NOW FOR THE PAINT**

Once the floor has been cleaned up the painter will come on-site. If you had any doubts about the colours you have selected get to the site now. You can request a couple of sample boards to be

## FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

painted so you can see the colour before they rip in and paint everything. You may want to meet with your designer on-site and discuss the colours. Take a sample of the fabric you're using on your workstation screens to see how that looks with the selected colours. Also check the position of any feature walls, feature wall colours require a different preparation than the common walls due to the deeper colour so if you are thinking about changing the location of feature walls do it now.

## **OTHER ITEMS**

Door installation, any ceilings works, sprinkler relocations and air conditioning registers are going in too. The builder will be trying to get all trades completed and out of the ceiling space so that he can close it up.

The paint is on the wall and you can really see the office coming to life now. A basic clean has been completed and part of the floor protection has been lifted so it's joinery and workstations time.

After that, fix off begins for all the service trades.

Electricians are fitting power points to the walls; plumbers installing sinks, sprinklers, air conditioning works are complete, and they have left the site.

We are into the last days and getting ready for handover, so it's really hectic on-site. A final clean has begun, rubbish is removed, painting touch-ups and data cabling tests done. Air flow is being tested; signage installed, security fitted off and tested. The builder is ticking off his checklist of outstanding items and his frequency of calls to you will have increased as he checks that everything is under control.

## **SUMMARY**

- The project is a go and action will be fast.
- Go on-site as the walls go up to check everything's okay.
- Be site safety conscious.
- Now is the time to rearrange walls if they're not quite right.
- Check paint colours now before it's too late.
- If you've organised trades, now's the time to get them on-site.



## CHAPTER 21

# WHO DOES WHAT, WHEN?

**A**s discussed, fitout happens fast. There is no time to waste and the fitout process is quick. Why is it generally so quick?

- The lack of business planning by client means the client needs to vacate their existing premises by a particular date
- Short rent-free period (the time when the landlord allows the fitout to be completed before they start charging rent). and client wants to take as much advantage of this as possible
- Need for office to be up and running to serve a new department of the business.

### KEEPING TRACK

Once again the list can be long and extensive. You'll need to keep track of everything as best you can. The only way to know who is doing what and when, is to insist on a construction program.

This should define exactly the expected progress of the project from start to finish. It's a guide and not an exact science, but I can tell you from experience that it is a wonderful planning tool that you should not work without. It keeps all parties focused on the current end game.

## **HOW IT WORKS IN PRACTICE**

I once had a project in Arundel a suburb of Brisbane, Australia where we were given nine weeks to design and fitout a 500m<sup>2</sup> medical centre from start to finish. We did not have a plan or any certification in place.

Through close collaboration with the client's architect we were able to design, certify, construct and move the client in within the given time frames.

The construction program is a great tool for everyone. As project manager and working closely with the designer, we used it to set and keep dates of when specific elements of design were required. We were literally building on-site to the plans we had and waiting in some instances for the new plans to arrive hot off the drawing board so we could continue to build.

Other key items included engineering diagrams, joinery elevations, council approval and certifications, construction start date and of course handover date.

My foreman constantly referred to and updated it and made all contractors aware of what was expected of them. It was pinned to walls in the lunchrooms. It was placed around the site so everyone could see it.

Do you think they would have been so aware of dates if it was not all around them and pointed out to them constantly? No.



It's a great tool that I highly recommend you use. It does not have to be complicated. A start/finish date for each item and dates for key events to be completed. Mark on it any items with long lead times – for example, when you need to place orders to get delivery of goods in time.

Without doubt, if you want to know who is doing what and when – use a construction program.

## **SUMMARY**

- Ask your builder for a construction program.
- Create your own in Excel spreadsheet or use software like MS Project.
- Keep it updated, share it with everyone and notate all the comings and goings.



## CHAPTER 22

# WHERE ARE MY SUB-TRADES?

**H**ave you ever wanted work done around the home and tried to get three contractors of the one trade to come round and give you a price?

### **JOIN THE CLUB**

My experience is that two of three turning up is a miracle and one out of three is the norm.

Now fortunately for you, as the client, the task of finding and arranging sub-trades is not really your problem – it's your builder's. However you will be affected if for some reason the builder's subcontractors do not come to site.

You must stay across site progress and the best way to keep your builder honest is to have weekly site meetings. Check the construction program and if, for example, the electricians were supposed to be on-site and they are not, ask the question. If you get to next week's site meeting and still no electricians, then ask same question.

## FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

There may be several reasons why they are not on-site:

- The contractor is a sole operator and is sick.
- Busy on another job, which is delayed so he is delayed getting to your job.
- Has not been paid by the builder and does not want to return to site until he has been paid.
- Waiting on materials.
- Underquoted so does not now want to do the job.

All possible reasons, none of which help you.

What about from your side? Do you have any trades that you have nominated as key suppliers? Maybe you have ordered some chairs or special feature items. Make sure you follow them up, to check on delivery dates.

## **CHECK YOUR OTHER VITALS TOO**

Have you organised the phone lines? Have you got the internet sorted? Will staff have access passes on day one? Note down all the 'necessaries' as you think of them on the construction program or your version of it. If you have responsibilities to deliver some key items – stay on it.

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**PRO TIP:** Remember the old saying – 'It's the squeaky wheel that gets oiled?' You need to be the squeaky wheel.

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The more times you call and check (be squeaky), I can guarantee the better chance that you will get your goods delivered when you want them.

## **SUMMARY**

- Getting trades on-site is an industry-wide problem.
- Constant tracking of the construction program will help you stay on top of it all.
- Make sure your self-organised trades and suppliers are on track too.
- Write everything down and refer to your checklists often.
- Don't be afraid to be a squeaky wheel.



## CHAPTER 23

# WHERE'S THE IT?

**A** key component in any 21st century business is, of course, Information Technology (IT), more commonly known as your computer system.

When was the last time you tried to run your business without computers? Do you remember how difficult it was? For some businesses, it would now be impossible to do anything.

Depending on the size of your business there may be several ways that your computers are managed:

- You may have an internal team of happy computer geeks ready to jump into action as soon as there is a problem.
- You may outsource to another company who come on-site or perform changes remotely by logging into your system.
- You might just go to your nearest technician shop if you have a problem.

Whatever your situation you need to consider IT in your design and building process.

**Elements to consider are:**

- What IT services are currently available at the site and what is the speed of those services?
- What type of computing needs will the business require in the coming months and years? For example, will most of your computing be cloud-based on the web? Or will it be site based where all data is stored in servers at the business?
- Where are we going to situate the server in the new office? Remember servers do not like heat and dust.

## **IT IS HOT**

I have seen computer servers placed in many different positions in the office environment. Some good and some not so good. We have built special purpose rooms to house computer racks, some with raised access floors and ramps so cabling can be run underneath the cabinet and be neatly installed. These rooms typically will have dedicated air conditioning and will run 24/7. The reason for this is because the equipment generates a lot of heat. By controlling the temperature environment there is less chance of overheating and burning out.

Cable management systems are used so that the incoming data cables are neatly clipped and bound together, so it's easy to make changes later. Usually these rooms will have a vinyl floor so as not to collect dust. Sometimes the vinyl can be antistatic which is another safety feature for an up-specified computer room. Typically these rooms provide plenty of access around the computer rack for the technician to access and work on the equipment.



These rooms would also house the phone system and possibly have the security system installed in them, as well as always having a lockable door.

## **WHAT ELSE MIGHT YOU NEED?**

Other options for these rooms include the fitting of a uninterrupted power supply (UPS) to manage the computer servers should there be a power outage. Basically this is a backup battery that can support the entire computer system for a number of hours. The more important the data and the need to be able to use the computers, the more detailed and powerful the UPS. Some computer rooms will also have specific fire suppressant systems so that should a fire break out, gasses will be released to squash the fire before it can take hold and any data and equipment destroyed.

On the flip side I have seen offices with 40 people, where the IT room is an enclosed cupboard with no ventilation, a mass of cables and fly leads running into it, covered in dust and no space around it whatsoever. You could fry an egg with the heat coming out of the cupboard and they are usually positioned in one of the busiest parts of the office, close to the reception desk or the staffroom. By some form of miracle, this works and I guess business owners work on the theory if it's not broke don't fix it.

## **WHAT TYPE OF CABLING ARE WE GOING TO RUN? OR WILL THE OFFICE BE WI-FI ONLY?**

During your design phase these sort of questions should be raised and answered. In my experience there are very few companies today that run a completely Wi-Fi system and I think it's understood that the speed transfers possible by a cable connection are still quicker than any Wi-Fi connection. Wi-Fi works better around the CBD and generally gets weaker the further you move away from this area. It depends on the mobile network strength of your chosen carrier and how many users are on it at any one time.

Someone on your team will need to be aware of the IT implications for your business. Most companies still install the blue cable Cat 5E, however there are other cables available such as Cat 6 and Cat 6A that can send the signal quicker if this is vital in your business. Look to the future for your industry and whether there may be a reason to have better and faster cabling installed. Perhaps for certification of your business procedures, so you can impress upon your clients and future clients that you are ready to work with them and have a state of the art IT system? It's far cheaper to do cabling now than pull things apart in a few years' time.

## **THE FUTURE**

Another thing to consider is the long-term requirements and the ability to scale up should the need arise. Do you have space on your server for more capacity? This is a critical element to be considered when budgeting the cost of your system. Does IT understand what Management are planning – don't be caught short!

Finally, what is your Disaster Recovery Plan? Where and how will you get your business systems back online if there is a disaster at your site? How is the data going to be saved, backed-up and secured?

Whatever the case, Information Technology is an essential cog in any business and all facets must be considered carefully when planning and building an office.

## **SUMMARY**

- IT install needs special thought.
- If you need a server room, there are cooling and power back-up considerations.
- Future-proof your IT install by enabling easy upgrades and space to take more cabling and better systems.
- Consider your back-up plans and your Disaster Recovery Plan when planning your IT room.



## CHAPTER 24

# WHO'S CLEANING THIS MESS UP?

**A**s an apprentice you get to learn many new things. Your mind is wide open and you are aware of everything going on around you. You are also taught the tricks of the trade by older, experienced guys, sometimes when you don't even know it.

Like cleaning for example – I cannot tell you how many times as an apprentice I swept the floor of the joinery shop and all I ever heard old Ronnie saying was a clean site is a safe site. Yeah OK, it makes sense now but then it just seemed like I was forever dancing with the broom. As I went through my apprenticeship I made sure that whilst I was on-site the premises were clean and safe. There are plenty of other dangers that can occur on a building site and by taking care of this simple task it reduced the number of possible accidents.

## **PROTECTS YOU AND THE SITE**

The other thing about keeping a site clean is that you reduce the risk of accidental damage to the building. How many buckets of water or cans of paint are accidentally knocked over due to someone tripping over rubbish they did not see? I can tell you, a lot. A clean site saves the cost of replacing carpet or patching a wall damaged by a ladder that someone was carrying when they tripped. This stuff happens and it does not need to, if the site is clean.

How is this relevant to you? You must remember that the beautiful pristine office space that you have just leased will become a building site for the duration of your fitout. When you first go on-site it may not be that pristine any more. Typically there will be toolboxes, rubbish bins, scaffolding and materials everywhere and then there will be the rubbish. Material offcuts, plasterboard sheet offcuts, plaster powder, water, greasy sprinkler pipes and threading equipment, *Red Bull* or other energy drink cans, *Subway* wrappers (I don't mean *Snoop Dog* here). The place will also smell different because of all the materials being used like glues, plasters, paint etc.

## **MESS CAN BE CONTROLLED**

There are ways to control the cleanliness of a site and you should insist on it to maintain safety and condition of the building.

- Insist on regular clean-ups. You should be able to see the floor protection. It should not be a mess of timber shavings or plaster dust after sanding.

- Make sure that the bins are emptied regularly as food scraps will start to smell if not removed after two weeks of sitting in the bottom of a bin.
- Make sure there are new bins to replace the full bins and that the site always has bins available for trades to place rubbish in.

This regular cleaning should happen during the project but remember this is not the final clean. The final clean should only happen at the end when all the mess making has been completed and you have entered the completion phase. Be careful not to start your final clean too early as you will find that the site may need to be cleaned twice and sometimes three additional times if some trades are not yet complete. They all make considerable mess.

## **FINAL CLEAN**

At the end of the project the builder will perform a final clean and you should be aware of this when reading through the builder's proposal. Ensure that they have allowed for a detailed clean which includes vacuuming carpets, mopping floor finishes, cleaning any existing or new toilets, wiping down skirting boards and door hardware, cleaning internal partition glass and wiping down existing window sills.

I always include in our proposals that we will clean the premises and handover it in a condition for the client to move into and start trading immediately. That's how clean it has to be.

Items that won't be included in a builder's cleaning price are:

- Cleaning external glass of the building.
- Cleaning external parts of the building (unless they specifically completed some external works).
- Removal of client's rubbish. For example if you ordered new furniture and it all came in boxes, the builder will not have quoted to remove it – he will remove it, but at a cost to you.
- Steam cleaning of carpets.

## **HOW CLEAN IS CLEAN?**

You should expect that the clean-up that you receive will be pretty good. There should be no signs of plasterboard dust or electrical wire offcuts on floor; new glass should be free of stickers and have no smudging on it and the wire used to straighten the glass panels removed, toilets wiped over, pans clean and sinks and mirrors clean, floor tiles also mopped. All joinery items should be vacuumed so there are no shavings or rubbish left in them (for example, no shavings left in installed cupboards). Workstation tops should be wiped down and clean. My personal favourite, all stickers on new white goods should be removed.

You should inspect the cleaning of the site at handover to ensure you are happy with the level of cleanliness. If not, then tell the builder and don't accept the site until you are happy with the clean.



## **SUMMARY**

- Keeping a clean and tidy site is your builder's responsibility.
- It protects workers and your building.
- Make sure regular clean-ups are scheduled and that a last 'final clean' that leaves the place spotless is priced in the quote.



## CHAPTER 25

# HAS ANYONE BOOKED THE REMOVALIST?

**Y**ou're almost in. The time is approaching when you need to start thinking about relocation to the new premises and how you are going to get all your stuff from here to there.

When is the most convenient time for your business – after hours or over a weekend? What if you're a seven-day business – how are you going to manage that situation? Who packs up all this stuff, do you need to get boxes, what about the computers, I hope they know how to handle them. How will you know if the new premises will be ready in time – hang on I have to be out of the current premises by a set date, so it better be ready!

### **PLANNED WELL IN ADVANCE**

The actual relocation from one business premises to another needs to be a well-planned part of the fitout process. Like all components of this jigsaw, it should not be left to the last minute.

So where should you start?

## **WHAT'S GOING?**

First step – look around your premises. What needs to go with you? As part of the design process the answer to that question should already be defined. You should have a very clear picture of what equipment is staying and what is going. Have that list close to hand because now is the time to review it and double-check that nothing has changed.

For example, you may have considered taking all your furniture with you – is that still the case?

## **GET THREE QUOTES**

Second step – call several removalists to come out and provide a quotation to relocate your office. Give them all the same information so that you get comparable prices. Be clear about what is staying and what is going. State exactly when you want it to happen. For example, from 5pm on a Friday night and have everything in position by 5pm Saturday afternoon. This allows them to calculate the amount of labour and number of trucks required to do the move within your schedule. You don't want to have one schedule and the removalist have another. It may be cheaper to have just two guys working for four days instead of ten guys for one day, but does it suit your schedule?

## **WHAT ARE YOU GETTING FOR THE PRICE?**

You also need to be clear about the service they are providing. Who is going to do the packing – them or you? What about computers?

Some companies won't touch them; others will say leave the monitors on the desk and we will wrap and relocate. Are boxes included or are they an extra cost? Some have special plastic crates complete with labels.

## **WHAT THEY'LL NEED**

Removalists will want to have a floor plan of the new premises so they can see the logistics of where everything has to go. They will want the plan marked-up showing everyone's desk with a name so that they can deliver each box and computer to the correct desk. They will want to check out the new premises for access, or at a minimum know if there is a lift and loading dock.

Third and final step who will be the removalist contact person? You want one key person to notify of any changes or to contact should there be problems. They will be the trusted person with the key to the premises if there is no one from your company around at the time of the move.

## **THINGS TO CHECK**

Always check that the removal company has insurance and that it is current. Ask for a certificate of currency and information on how the insurance can be claimed should anything go wrong in the move. They may give you a separate policy just for your move.

Watch for items such as photocopiers, especially if they are under lease. They may not be covered by removalist insurance, and typically need to be relocated by the company you purchased

## FIRST TIME **FITOUT**

them from to avoid a default on any warranties. Check the small print on this item.

Because this part of the process has all personnel involved, everyone needs to know the game plan. When it comes time for them to action their part of the plan provide a clear written description of what is expected of each person, when you want it to happen and by what time it needs to be completed. Provide this information a few weeks out from the move so there are no surprises.

If anyone is going to be away, then make special arrangements. Perhaps they will need to have a colleague pack on their behalf or ask them to pack before they leave.

Take the moving time as an opportunity to declutter. It's amazing what you hold onto for no real reason. Now is the time folks, dump it!

You may even want to get a skip bin in the week before the move, so people can unload all that unwanted stuff. It may even save some removalist costs.

## **SUMMARY**

- Plan your move in plenty of time.
- Checklists are your friend.
- Get three quotes and ask for insurance certificates of currency.
- Check the small details – who is supplying the boxes, are computers included?

# CHAPTER 26

## DE-FIT

### What's That All About?

**S**o you have done it. You have successfully planned and completed the leasing, design and construction of your new business premises and relocated the complete team all over one weekend. Brilliant job. Well done you!

Now what about the old premises, what are your legal obligations to the old landlord?

“What are you talking about? Do you mean I have to do something at the old place?” Yes, most likely.

### **YOU'LL NEED TO DO A MAKE-GOOD**

If it was your choice to leave the old premises, more than likely you have an obligation to the landlord to make-good. This means you need to leave the premises in a condition that the landlord can turn around and re-lease it, without it costing the landlord any money to tidy up the mess you left.

So how do you know if you must do this work? Get your solicitor to review your current lease and determine if there is

a make-good clause included. Nine times out of ten there is, but sometimes you get lucky.

Here is what you need to do to complete your obligation to the landlord at a reasonable cost:

Firstly – you must establish the extent of the make-good works. Details will be in your lease and there may even be photos of the property before you commenced your lease that will define how it used to look prior to you moving in.

So a limited make-good might consist of removing all existing partitions, repainting all remaining building walls and steam cleaning the carpet.

However, an extensive make-good would also include removal of ceiling tiles and replacement with new; replacing all light tubes with new and cleaning light fittings; replacing light fittings, air conditioning vents and fire services back into a standard open-plan layout; replacing the carpet with new; painting lift doors and frames; and replacing or patching the perimeter ducted skirting.

So, as you can see, it's very important to clarify the extent of works, prior to starting.

I have been involved in jobs where the tenant thought the make-good meant one thing and the landlord another. We were engaged by the tenant to undertake a certain level of make-good works, which we did, only to be called back by the tenant to complete further works as required by the landlord.

You want to avoid this situation for a couple of reasons:

1. When we went back, we pulled up the existing carpet that we had just steam cleaned and replaced it with new. The tenant had wasted \$1,000 on steam cleaning. You want to avoid double handling where possible.



2. Depending on your lease terms and conditions and your negotiation skills, the landlord can and will charge you additional monthly rent if you have not completed your make-good to their standards by a set date. If you were supposed to be made-good and handed the keys back by 30th June, yet your still making-good on 1st July, then the landlord is entitled to claim rent, as in theory, he could already have had a new tenant leasing the space and would be losing revenue.

The make-good is the final part of the puzzle, and the common denominators of time and money still play a part in the process. You need to investigate the make-good clause as a part of your overall game plan to ensure you understand your obligations, allow sufficient time to complete the make-good and have budgeted to pay for the work.

## **SUMMARY**

- De-fit is the process of getting out of your current premises.
- Make-good is the process of returning your premises to a leasable state.
- Make sure you understand the make-good obligations included in your lease.



# CONCLUSION

## I'm good at this stuff

**Y**ou might recall from the first chapter, the story of the flooded reception? That foreman has been a great friend of mine since we were 16 and starting our trade course at the local Technical and Further Education (TAFE) college as young carpenters and joiners.

The years that have followed have seen many of life's ups and downs just like everyone else, but it's always, always a pleasure to be working with friends, especially great friends. We have worked on many and various jobs over the years and in recent times we have completed some great fitouts across Australia, most of the time under a tight schedule.

When everything is done and dusted, the job's complete, even if it is sometimes in the wee small hours of the morning. It's great to stop, look around, give a little nod and a smile. And as a way of saying thanks, one of us will proclaim, "We are good at this stuff."

And that is all that needs to be said. Close the door and walk away knowing that you have done the best job you can.

If you have finished reading this book and are now perhaps embarking on your first fitout, I hope that it is a satisfying journey for you. I trust that this book has provided you

with a structure to follow and the tools to let you build a solid platform to work from.

Watch out for those rookie mistakes and be sure to take in the ‘PRO TIPS’ provided in each chapter. Keep your tools sharp and don’t forget to switch them on each and every day.

If you have managed to achieve a transparent, uncomplicated and pleasant building experience through the words I have shared, then I have achieved what I set out to do with this book.

You have my permission, in fact it’s a ‘must do moment’ at the end of the job, to please stop, look around, give a little nod and a smile. And as a way of saying thanks, proudly proclaim to yourself, “I am good at this stuff.”

Happy building and keep on smiling.

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What a great way to reflect on the many that have entered my life, some for a short time, others forever.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George Gatt is a carpenter by trade, a licensed builder in three states of Australia and a successful small business owner since 1992. George moved to Sydney in 1988 and at the age of 22 was soon responsible for managing 40 tradespeople typically working simultaneously on projects with several levels of fit out.



His company now specialises in full consult, design and purpose built fitouts for established companies who need to either improve or move.

George draws on a wealth of experience by guiding clients through the fitout process. In addition he helps clients set realistic time frames and budgets. The key benefit to all his clients is helping them avoid costly pitfalls and unnecessary stress.

George is known for coining the phrase, '*We make office fitout easy*' which is his company's motto. Importantly George has been a strong advocate for a coherent and transparent building process since 1992.

George brings this enviable level of experience in this industry to this book.

George has been married for 20 years, has two daughters and lives in Camden, NSW.

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## **CONTACT OFFICE BUILDERS FOR A CLEAR GAME PLAN**

Clarifying the scope of works leads to realistic time frames and budgets. Get your project started on the right path, avoid the pitfalls and unnecessary stress, see how George's company, *Office Builders*, can assist you.



## **FREE REPORT: TOP 25 PRO TIPS**

If you enjoyed *First Time Fitout* and you are thinking about building or refurbishing please download our free report *Top 25 Pro Tips For Leasing, Designing and Building Your New Office* from [www.firsttimefitout.com](http://www.firsttimefitout.com)



