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Incomparable FRAMEWORK

Weeks Group is driven by innovation in its product development, which has helped expand the company's operations into the Middle East and the United States.

Images by David Evans

Kevin Weeks, Managing Director of Weeks Group, has spent more than 30 years developing and perfecting a complete building solution. Today, the Weeks Group is comprised of a real estate company, five building companies, and a manufacturing business which continues to build homes and to design and manufacture steel framing products for the Australian residential and commercial construction industry.

Having started out in real estate, by the late 1980s Kevin Weeks had built Weeks & Macklin Real Estate into 26 franchises. He then began to pursue land development, which in turn led to the establishment of a building business. Rapid success

and expansion led to the creation of several building brands to meet housing market demand and the manufacture of building technologies such as Supaloc® steel framing. Offering a turnkey solution has meant ensuring alignment and consistency across Weeks Group's different branches.

"Real estate led to the building industry, and building led to the manufacturing industry," says Kevin. "The great part about the integration of each one of these areas is that we're basically all in the same business. We provide shelter: we sell shelter in the real estate business; we build shelter through our building brands; and we manufacture the products that go into the construction of the shelter."

The success of Weeks Group has been underpinned by the evolution and manufacture of Supaloc, the world's best steel framing system, the result of Kevin's vision and many years of testing and innovation.

The decision to vertically integrate came out of necessity. Dissatisfaction with the performance of timber framing and the need to provide a point of difference in the market provoked Kevin to invent the Supaloc steel framing system in the 1990s. The Supaloc system is manufactured using innovative and patented computer-aided-design- (CAD) driven machinery, which delivers a product far superior to other steel or timber frames. The SBSCad software >





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system has been customised in house for the Supaloc product and allows for the three-dimensional design of structures.

The direct link between the SBSCad design and the production guarantees pinpoint accuracy and efficient production. "What makes our organisation unique is that it we are part of every aspect of the building cycle. It starts with research and development of our steel framing system, which feeds into software development, followed by manufacture, assembly, and the final build of the home by one of our building companies. We seek constant feedback from the people who work with our products, which allows us to continually improve our systems and processes as the cycle starts again."

Originally, Weeks Group aimed to simply buy steel frames, before

deciding to source a system that gave the organisation more control. "That was an important lesson. It basically taught us what not to do. The quality of the product was poor and the production slow. What we took from this experience was the realisation that we needed to design and produce our own machines to manufacture our unique product."

In the years that followed, constant research and development and refinement resulted in roll form machinery that produced a highly accurate product that is recognised as cutting edge around the world. The machines have been designed to provide minimal operator interference, creating easy and efficient maintenance.

While innovation and product development is a key aspect of Weeks Group's success, Kevin believes none of it would >





“It’s very easy for us to continually develop because we’re getting constant feedback. We’ve got two ears and one mouth and we use it in that proportion—we listen to what our people tell us.”

- Kevin Weeks

have been possible without his invaluable staff. “Basically, all of our success comes down to the quality and appreciation of your staff. In our organisation, I consider my staff my ‘second family’. No one person runs this business; I have a great relationship with all of my CEOs, but we work as a team. There is no ‘I’ in this organisation; it’s ‘we’. Everyone participates in the growth of the company.

“Communication is critical; we listen to the people who matter most and make sure all staff are heard. Feedback from the guys assembling on the factory floor and our tradespeople on site has to reach the boardroom table where key decisions are made in order for us to improve. It’s very easy for us to continually develop because we’re getting this constant feedback. We’ve got two ears and one mouth and we use it in that proportion—we listen to what our people tell us.”

It is this drive for perfection that has also made the organisation a favourite among subcontractors, who most benefit from the ease and simplicity of Weeks Group’s frames. The tradespeople are a critical driving force in the growth of the product. They voice their preference for the Supaloc system due to its ease of construction. “We recognised right from day one that we needed their support if we wanted to succeed. In response to this challenge, we produced a system that was not only lightweight; it utilised a series of brackets and connections that made it so simple to erect. The result was reduced time on site for tradespeople, which increased income and productivity; it’s a win-win.”

The success of Weeks Group’s original developments has seen the company expand into new regions, both national and international. Operations in Australia include a South Australian head office and manufacturing facility, two

factories in Sydney, with expansion into Queensland and Victoria taking place in the very near future, while the international potential of the system has been exploited in Abu Dhabi and, more recently, Connecticut.

The joint venture factory in the UAE was the first of more manufacturing facilities due to be constructed in the Middle East. “International connections are not something we have pursued; they have in fact come to us. Our partner in Abu Dhabi searched the world for a superior light-gauge steel framing system and his investigation ended at Supaloc.

“This project is gaining a lot of traction. We’re about to sign a contract for seven million square feet—a big labour camp that will take two and a half to three years to construct. The product speaks volumes, and international growth of the business is taking care of itself to an extent.”



A similar situation saw Supaloc enter the US market via a partnership facilitated by the Connecticut Government’s First Five job-creation initiative. “The Connecticut Government recognise that to have any opportunity of gaining market share and producing jobs in their state, they require state-of-the-art manufacturing technology. They did their homework, and ultimately decided that Supaloc was a perfect fit for their First Five job-creation initiative. The equipment is being built at our South Australian facility to be shipped to Connecticut, and we’re looking forward to starting production in a couple months.”

Kevin is excited about the future of his company, particularly with the development of a new thermally insulated wall called Thermaloc®. Given the increasing emphasis being placed on residential building thermal efficiency by both federal and state governments, the introduction of Thermaloc is a

timely innovation. Thermaloc is a structural building system that combines the strength of Supaloc steel framing with the outstanding thermal properties of rigid cellular insulation. “Thermaloc is an affordable, high-performance building technology that delivers proven results in premium, low-energy, sustainable homes,” Kevin adds.

The significance of Thermaloc was recognised by the award of a federal Climate Ready grant for research and development in 2008, as well as a South Australian Innovation and Investment Fund (SAIIF) grant in 2010 for the purchase of essential manufacturing equipment. “We’ve been testing the system for the past three years, and in peak periods we can save 50 per cent of the energy required to heat or cool a home over and above a 6 Star energy-rated house.

“Thermaloc is our next big project, and we see it playing a large part >

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in the future growth of the company. It is an extension of the already successful Supaloc System. The two products go hand in hand, as the Thermaloc system is moulded into Supaloc framing.”

Kevin strongly believes that his success is not just attributable to working hard, but also to embracing a team structure. “If you were to ask me what the key to success is—apart from persistence, which is number one—it’s maintaining good working relationships with all of my team. Obviously, one of the greatest challenges that any business faces is recruiting the right staff; the capital of any business is its people. We have got a great team of very enthusiastic people. And because we’re continually improving our product and processes, it’s not a mundane environment; it’s forever evolving. Most people have a five-year plan, but we have a six-month plan because we find that five years is way too far out.



“Having a world-class product is not the end of our journey. We don’t rest on our laurels; research and development continues, we write software and test products

every day of the week, and we’re constantly improving our manufacturing processes. Basically, it’s innovate or die, and that’s what we live by.” ●



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