



# SAFETY First

NA Group's dedication to safety, quality, and the environment sets it apart from other road and civil services companies.

Images by Scott Ehler

When Nick Argyropoulos was just 18 years old, he left his family's earthmoving equipment business, bought his own machine, founded NA Group, and began by working as a plant operator. He became a subcontractor for the RMS [Roads and Maritime Services (NSW) or RTA, as it was then known] and continued to grow his company and work his way up the ranks. Today, NA Group has an impressive portfolio of large-scale road and civil works, and the company's innovative approach to improving safety has been extensively awarded.

"It was difficult being taken seriously at that age, but I persevered, and persistence pays

off," Nick says. "I just had to improve my knowledge over time, lay low, and learn what I could. Once I knew my stuff, I just had to go about proving how good I was, rather than talking about it."

Nick has always strongly believed in the importance of workplace safety, high-quality service, and conserving the environment. "I have worked hard with my staff to ensure that they respect the same sorts of values. When you implement this attitude from the top, it works its way right through the company. But you have to walk the walk, not just talk the talk. I always lead by example to prove that those values are important."

One of the ways Nick has been instilling these values in the workplace is by using technology

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to innovate safety practices. "I had a vision about five years ago, purely and simply because all of the paperwork that we have on site to be compliant was an absolute mess. With the paper system, the guys wouldn't have the latest forms, or they would lose them; it was very hard to keep track of who had what on site."

In response to these problems, Nick decided to develop and implement a paperless safety management system using a number of different apps. Under the scheme, dedicated on-site safety officers are equipped with iPads to keep documentation relating to risk assessment, training, and incident reporting up to date and in one location. The system won the 2012 NSW SafeWork Award for >



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Best Workplace Health and Safety Practices.

“The system is a work in progress, and we’re continuously making improvements to it,” says Nick. “In the beginning, our people were a bit reluctant to use the system, but once they saw how it was set up, how easy it is to use, and how much time it saves them, the guys embraced it. It was quite easy to implement it across the board.”

According to Nick, the key challenges he faces are differentiating the company in a competitive marketplace, and finding great staff. NA Group seeks to stand out from the crowd through innovation, and the iPad safety system is just one example. “I attend a lot of conferences relating to our field around the world, in order to see the latest products, innovation, and technology so we stay at the forefront of our industry.”

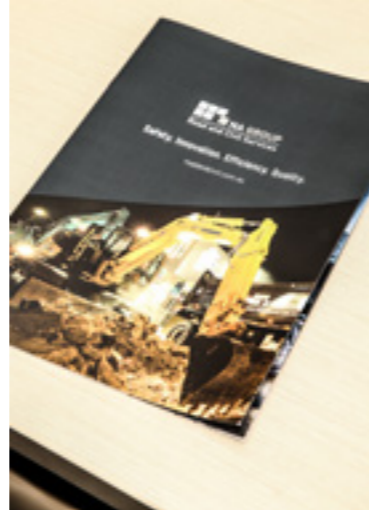
One of NA Group’s defining attributes is a determination to do its jobs thoroughly, on time, on budget, and exceeding client expectations—without compromising on safety. “We set ourselves apart by giving customers what they pay for. Many other companies offer a cheaper rate, and compromise on quality

and safety, but I’m very fussy about doing the job the right way.

“It can be challenging getting clients to understand that price isn’t the only important factor, and ensuring they look at the overall value for money, as opposed to just the bottom dollar. We offer much better value for money when you consider that the whole package, from planning to delivery, is what we provide. Getting people to understand that has been one of our biggest challenges, especially with local government.”

When it comes to hiring the right employees, Nick is adamant that attitude is more important than experience. “As long as the person has the right attitude, that they are safe in what they do, and they are a cultural fit for our company, I’m willing to build around that. In some respects, I prefer to hire people without too much experience because they don’t bring any baggage; we can mould them and train them into the kind of employees we want.”

To this end, NA Group runs a new training program every month, combining external third-party training with in-house experience. “Depending on each individual’s position, we’ll make sure they receive relevant, specified training.



We never send anybody out on their own at first, even if they are experienced. New employees will work alongside our current team for at least one month so that they can understand the core values of our business and how we like to run things.”

NA Group brings this emphasis on teamwork to bear when dealing with suppliers. According to Nick, honesty and transparency are vital for a good business relationship. “We have a meeting with all of our suppliers and partners every three months to discuss ideas around innovation, what things we can do better, and what things they can do better. We always lead by example, so we try to update the measures we have put in place in terms of safety, environment, and quality so that our business partners learn from us, and we learn from them as well.”

One of NA Group’s core concerns is ensuring that its projects don’t damage the environment. “We’re an ISO-accredited company, so we have our safety-QA officer on site and he looks after the environment as well. All our trucks are environmentally friendly, according to Euro 5 specifications. From run-off and sedimentation controls, right down to recycling and noise pollution, we are very cautious about making sure we’re not doing any damage to the environment.”

Looking to the future, Nick is eager to expand the company and to offer a total-package solution. “So, rather than just concrete maintenance, it will be the whole maintenance service delivery,” Nick explains. •



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