



As featured in
The CEO Magazine
For more info visit
theceomagazine.com.au



Design and CONSTRUCT

Since 2000, Hacer Group has been focused on delivering innovative property design and construction services to its loyal clientele base.

Images courtesy of Hacer Group

Building solid relationships with clients, employees, and subcontractors is central to Hacer Group's business operations. It has an extensive offering of cost-effective yet high-quality projects that satisfy its customer base and keep them coming back.

Hacer Group was started by Rob Pitts and Kevin Hibberson in 2000, and by 2010 they had 70 staff members and an annual turnover of \$90 million. Today, those figures have expanded to more than 200 employees and a turnover approaching \$400 million.

Vin Sammartino joined Hacer Group as a director in 2010. He has more than 30 years of experience in the construction industry and is highly knowledgeable on the nuances of the sector. Vin believes Hacer Group's success comes on the back of the foundations laid by Rob and Kevin, and the combination of competent employees and site teams adhering to a series of well-constituted strategic decisions.

"We basically sat down in 2010 and formulated a business plan to promote and expand the organisation into the residential space and maintain our market share in our existing markets. The aim was to build quality projects for good clients and consolidate our place in the residential market, and I think we've pretty much exceeded that expectation," Vin says. "It has been a challenging but rewarding journey for our organisation. We're not a litigious style of builder; we're an easygoing and user-friendly contractor. Our relationships are still very much based on the ethos of doing business in the 'old' way, and I think a lot of our clients have been incredibly surprised and appreciative of that. They've been delivered good-quality projects, on budget and on time. It's amazing how success manifests itself and it keeps on rolling. We don't sit back on our laurels; to the contrary, we are very keen to keep improving. At a senior management level, we're always working out how we can do things better. We work very hard on the business."

Vin's leadership style is straightforward and to the point, and he doesn't procrastinate around decision-making. "I think it's good to make decisions quickly and concisely, then move on to the next challenge—otherwise you're carrying a lot of excess baggage around that then bogs you down and compromises future outcomes," he explains. "Everyone in their own way, shape, or form is a leader. I don't necessarily think there's a right way or a wrong way to lead; leadership comes down to earning respect at all levels of the business. I come from a background where you earn respect over time, and that's usually done by rolling your sleeves up and achieving things. The future of our business is giving all our staff the opportunities to initiate and develop their own leadership styles.

"I'm fairly old school, so my words are my bond. As a business, we try to ensure that whatever commitments we're communicating to our staff, clients, and stakeholders are being upheld. The old adage of 'your word is >



your bond' is a fairly old-fashioned way of doing business compared to what's happening these days, but it has worked well for me."

Vin and all the team at Hacer Group have worked diligently to build very strong relationships over time with all stakeholders; these relationships are the backbone of Hacer Group's success. Vin's background in subcontracting

"There are a lot of young staff within the organisation. We're proud of the fact that our graduates and younger generation are being given the appropriate training and skills to handle the challenges of the industry."

- Vin Sammartino

has given him a broad perspective of the construction industry. These relationships and experiences have enabled Vin to build a vast network of people throughout the industry.

"It is paramount for the success of our business that all our staff are empowered to forge strong and robust relationships with their relevant stakeholders. It really is about giving them the steering wheel. We want to let them operate within the framework we have created. There are a lot of young staff within the organisation. We're proud of the fact that our graduates and younger generation are being given the appropriate training and skills to handle the challenges of the industry. We want them to progress out of the Hacer Group development programs with the appropriate skills they require to succeed but, just as important, ultimately to be good people."

Hacer Group's graduate program aims to teach participants a set of

interpersonal skills that will benefit them greatly in the future. Areas covered include personal effectiveness, creative thinking, problem solving, communication, commercial negotiation, and conflict management.

"Graduates join us straight out of university. They come into the business and, in fairness, are fairly naïve," Vin says. "We have a responsibility to train them and steer them down their chosen path. Our program is based around them advancing through most aspects of the business, spending time in each of those areas to see where they thrive and what they enjoy doing. We then give them the support, training, and motivation they need to pursue their chosen career path."

"There are different elements to this business; it's not just about building. There's finance, development, occupational health and safety, quality management, building, administration, design, estimating,

and cost planning. Then there are, of course, the site-based roles. Most graduates have aspirations of where they see themselves, but these aspirations constantly change once they've endured certain experiences. These days, it's absolutely vital that you have the right programs in place to make sure these graduates are given the right education. They are your future: they create and maintain the enduring culture of the organisation. Then the big issue is making sure you hang onto them."

Hacer Group collaborates closely with its key suppliers, subcontractors, and other stakeholders. It has set high expectations to ensure all projects are completed efficiently and effectively. Vin says, "Clients pick us because they think we can deliver. We're only as good as our subcontractors and suppliers. We've got to select the people that we believe are right for the job and will deliver to our standards. The majority of our clientele are repeat customers. It is paramount that our subcontractors focus on meeting our expectations. It is imperative that our subcontractors and suppliers have the same rigour around safety as we do and that they take it seriously. They have to be on board with all our systems and processes."

In recent years, the construction industry has experienced a skills shortage, to which Hacer Group has not been immune. Vin notes that when the mining boom was in full gear, many younger employees in the construction industry couldn't say no to the appeal of working in a remote location for larger sums of pay. "This definitely created a shortage of skilled labour coming through the ranks."

"With the demands of the mining boom diminishing, we found 12 months ago that there were a lot more people looking for work. But within the past year, the volume of work in the Melbourne and Sydney markets especially has increased dramatically. Most of the supply has been taken up, and there definitely is a shortage again of quality skilled labour."

"I've been very fortunate in life that I've found something that I've loved doing from a very young age. I think that if you don't love it, you can't endure it."

- Vin Sammartino



"The government at a federal level needs to be more aggressive in implementing apprenticeship programs across all trades and incentivising subcontractors to participate in the employment of apprentices. It will certainly help with the current youth unemployment issues as well as addressing the future skills shortage confronting our industry."

Hacer Group is a diverse business that works across a variety of sectors including retail, commercial, residential, medical, aged care, and recreational. "We like the fact that we're not one-dimensional," Vin says. "We have that variety, and I think that's a positive for us and a benefit to our clients. We are better equipped to smooth out some of the lumps and bumps that others contractors go through."

Looking to the future, Hacer Group hopes to expand geographically outside of its current operations in Victoria. "Whether that's into Sydney, Brisbane, or somewhere else, that's something we'll certainly explore, as well as any other opportunities that may arise. At the same time, our focus is to keep on building our reputation and enhancing our credibility with our clientele and within the general construction industry in Victoria. Design and construct is a challenging business model—you have to remain relevant. It's a market where you've got to keep your finger on the pulse to take advantage of opportunities that present at any

given time and maximise returns to the business.

"I think the next couple of years are going to be tough, and only the strong will survive. It's certainly an interesting and challenging market going forward: there is a lot of pressure on margins right across the current landscape. There are going to be a lot of challenges for the industry, and it's going to be a matter of who copes best with those challenges."

"From a young eight year old travelling from job to job on weekends with my grandfather, I knew that I had a penchant for the excitement that the construction industry offers. It's all good fun. But the thing about this caper is that if you don't love it, then don't do it. You have to be passionate. It's one of those industries where you can't fluff your way through it. You're either in or you're not. I've been very fortunate in life that I've found something that I've loved doing from a very young age. I think that if you don't love it, you can't endure it."

"The most exciting thing about our business has been taking our staff on the journey with us and watching them blossom. We've really enjoyed being able to create opportunities for our clients and deliver to their expectations—there is a real sense of satisfaction in that process. It has been a stimulating and rewarding passage." •



Dodd Structural Pty Ltd

Dodd Structural specialises in structural steel fabrication and installation with capabilities for reengineering works. Dodd Structural has the ability to handle a range of projects from heavy commercial to light intricate works.

13 Production Drive
Campbellfield VIC 3061
Phone: (03) 9357 5448
Fax: (03) 9357 5449

