



THE Right FIT

Tu Projects has been creating custom fit-outs for businesses across Australia for a decade thanks to its entrepreneurial spirit and out-of-the-box thinking.

Images by Fullframe Photographics

When Robert Rowe took the giant step of establishing his own fit-out business, he knew he would either sink or swim. At the age of 23, he set up Tu Projects, developed a unique piece of software, and ultimately changed the way shopfitting was approached.

Because Robert grew up in a shopfitting family, the business was in his blood—and seeing the potential in the industry, he knew there was more to be done. With a history in the retail and shopfitting industries, and with his parents still a decade away from retirement, he knew the only way to achieve his vision would be to go out on his own.

“I worked on the factory floor of my family’s business, which later led to opportunities in estimation,” Robert says. “I was also working in retail for a number of years while working for my parents. After estimating, I got into project management and started bringing

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in a lot of business for my family’s company. I was working almost seven days a week leading into starting my own company, and then seven days a week after. I was 23 when I realised I couldn’t control my enthusiasm and passion to do something different in the market anymore, so I saw an opportunity and took it.”

Drawing on the tutelage of his father, vigilance in finance from his mother, and thriving on the passion behind his dream, Robert took the giant step. He has never looked back since establishing Tu Projects, steadily and strategically growing the business to the point where it’s become an industry leader, with offices in Sydney, Brisbane, and Melbourne.

Always looking for ways to remain competitive, Robert knows his team works around the clock to ensure Tu Projects gives the best fit-out experiences possible. With dedicated teams throughout Australia, the business’s goal to be known as the best shopfitter in the business

is kept alive. With a strong business model behind it, since 2004 Tu Projects is only looking one way and that way is up.

With his history in the shopfitting industry, Robert identified the importance of remaining genuine in the appreciation of the business’s success. He saw his father walking around the factory floor getting to know his team, which really bridged the gap between the office and the factory floor. He believes everyone is a valuable team member because, at the end of the day, what is a business without a strong team?

“It’s all about engaging better with people in the organisation and getting everybody on the same page. One thing I identified in other business’s models is that everybody expects that the boss only wanted to make money and wasn’t willing to compromise or review different ways of constructing to give the customer a more efficient cost while not compromising on quality. As a result, they are expensive in the >



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marketplace and opportunities become lost.

“At Tu Projects, we are always looking for ways to remain competitive and ensure our customers are receiving the best experience possible. In 2004, I wanted our clients to have a refreshing experience when working with Tu Projects. In 2014, it hasn’t changed.”

Rethinking and re-examining the nature and processes of a business is something that Robert is very familiar with. Since Tu Projects was established 10 years ago, he has seen the company go through a series of significant transformations. One of the most substantial transformations was when Tu Projects decided to invest in its sourcing and supply methods.

“We were originally a project management company that didn’t manufacture anything,” explains Robert. “In 2011, we were getting

to a size where it was difficult to outsource all our production, and we weren’t getting the level of quality and consistency that we wanted. We set up our own manufacturing facility for joinery and our own sign company.

“We invested in a steel fabrication company that made incredibly well-crafted stainless steel products. We also established a partnership with a catering equipment supply business. That literally controlled all the critical elements in our projects independently, which meant that we knew when things would be arriving, what things would cost, and we could adjust pricing to suit our customers and manage the quality.

“Our partnerships are very important. We communicate with all partners weekly about what’s happening, and if we have issues, we work collaboratively to solve them. We want to be a partner in a

problem. That’s how we’ve always managed our relationships.

“From 2011 onwards, we actually started winning a tremendous amount of awards. We set some organisational quality standards during that period, and as a result we’re now the largest company in Australia for what we do and we’re seen as being one of the most quality-driven businesses. We deal with really nice brands in Australia and overseas. For example, the second largest retailer in the world is one of our clients in Australia, and we see a long future with them.”

The Tu Projects journey is a unique success story in an industry that doesn’t have a lot of them. Robert states, “We’re heads above the market, so the nearest competitor to us would probably be four times smaller than us. We have our own IT department and we develop our own software. We’re the only business in Australia in our sector that has a tendering and



project management tracking system that our customers can be engaged with at all levels and visibly see the cost of their project. No other business provides that level of transparency.

“We always say that we pride ourselves on becoming the customer. When we work with a client, we work with them as if we were them and we treat them how we would wish to be treated and communicated with. To achieve that, we built those systems and software that help us and our customers engage on a much more transparent and collaborative level.”

This approach has seen Tu Projects tackle some substantial ventures, one of note being the upgrade of Sydney Airport’s Terminal 2 in 2009. “We did about \$4 million worth of fit-outs. We did 13 projects in the airport, and we were the largest provider of interior fit-out in the airport, working for several international and domestic airport retailing groups.

“That was a challenging project, as we were working with international clients and it was during the GFC. It’s an experience that we’ve certainly learned from and it’s put us in a position of growth. From 2009, we’ve had our most significant growth.”

As the company has continued to grow, Tu Projects has drawn on its strong, dedicated team and collaborative culture to facilitate and foster this development. “We hold weekly meetings with our project management team, covering our current projects and ensuring our quality control. We talk a lot about experience; it’s probably the most important word we use in our company. What experience are we giving to our business and our staff? What experience are they giving to our customers?”

“I like to know everybody on my staff so I can understand how they feel. Obviously, if they’re in a good place then our customers will be in a better place. It’s not uncommon for me to have conversations with staff daily. Half or at least three-quarters of our staff would have a decent discussion with me on a daily basis. We have 150 employees in our company, so it’s difficult to get to know everybody, but I do enjoy meeting everyone and I make a real effort.”

Robert and his team have ambitious plans for Tu Projects as the company continues to evolve. “We are going to hit \$90 million this year, and our goal by 2020 is to reach \$200 million. We have a lot of big plans for our businesses and are constantly looking for ways to be innovative and remain competitive.



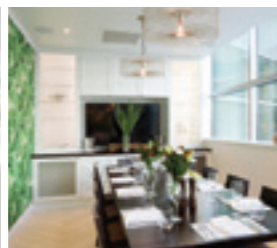
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“We’ll be taking our business internationally as well. We want to take our business into Singapore, London, and Los Angeles, in that order. To take our business overseas, our international model will change from being a fit-out business with internal manufacturing to being a pure project management business that manages client-side the international work. We’re already working in Sri Lanka and Dubai. We have found that knowing how to produce a project from all manufacturing elements to construction in Australia, we can use this experience overseas to better manage the bid process with other builders. It has helped us significantly reduce the cost of delivering projects overseas. We also perform as a business private property development using our internal design-and-construct department.”

With strong systems in place and an impressive portfolio of projects across the retail, hospitality, health, commercial, and residential landscapes, Tu Projects will continue to lead the Australian market and work with domestic and international clients to achieve exceptional custom fit-outs. ●

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