

Inspiring the Industry

After more than 20 years in the property industry, Spiire Managing Director, Mark Breuer, knows how to build a business.

Images by Joseph Feil

After graduating from university as an engineer, Mark Breuer took on a role in the public sector. Quickly realising that this wasn't for him, he began working for the property consulting company that would eventually become Spiire. "I started off in local government, but worked out fairly quickly it wasn't me, and that I always wanted to be in the private sector. Growing up, my family were quite active property developers in Victoria, so it was in the blood," Mark says.

Mark progressed quickly in his new role, being trusted with high-level decision-making at a young age. The founder of the company, Douglas Coomes, and the board trusted Mark and mentored him. "The business was going through a rapid growth period. We were only based in Melbourne and looking for opportunities to expand. So, when

the opportunity came up to open a new office in regional Shepparton Victoria, Doug had a chat with me.

"I was 30 years old, leading our first regional Victoria office. My focus was on growing the business and building relationships. Relationships are key for any business, and are absolutely critical for a business in a regional location. Originally, I was going to be placed there for two years, but eight years later, I left after starting two other offices, in Albury and Bendigo, growing them to about 50 staff. I returned to Melbourne in the late 2000s as part of the company's succession plan.

"When I joined the business just over 20 years ago, it was quite a small engineering practice. It then grew to a point where our offering was diversified in both services and geography—this made it attractive to larger businesses. In 2005, it was bought

by publicly listed construction company, Downer.

"There were a lot of lessons to be learnt through that time, and the business probably got a little distracted from its core market in property. In 2011, Downer started the process of divesting its consulting businesses. Through this, senior business leaders—Stephen Nolan, Michael Lewis, and I—decided to undertake a management buyout, and rebranded the business as Spiire."

Although Spiire has seen several ownership changes over the past thirty years, and has changed course along the way, today it has refocused to embrace its core business and elements of its humble beginnings, including a focus on relationships and investing in its people.

"Since that management buyout, we've really focused on bringing the business back to its core >



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market, which is the property sector. There has been a strong emphasis on ensuring we have very good capability and depth of capacity within our teams to deliver, as well as building strong relationships with clients, partners and key stakeholders.”

Despite shifting away from the property industry—the strong suit of the business—Mark and his team have been able to transition the business back into a growth phase over the past two years. “We’ve actually grown the business, in both people and revenue, by 40 per cent over the last two years. It’s a fairly significant growth in a short period of time in what’s a relatively new business in some ways. While being in a significant growth period might sound fantastic, it also presents plenty of challenges when it comes to delivery and meeting client expectations, so we’re always looking at ways to improve our processes.”

Mark has also introduced a number of new initiatives, including international study tours for staff. “As a business, we are focused on developing our people—we want to be an employer of choice. Study tours provide staff with exposure to the best property development principles all over the world. This enables them to expand their depth of



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knowledge and apply international concepts to local projects. It also allows them to build relationships with international counterparts and clients.

“We’re one of the very few consulting companies offering this opportunity. Study tours differ by industry, but ours are quite focused. A team of eight are heading up our current US study tour, which includes three clients, as well as five staff from each of our disciplines. All representatives have different skill sets, and are at all different stages of their careers—we have graduates through to directors participating.”

Mark and the team have also developed a tailor-made senior leadership program called ‘Inspiring the Leaders’. The interactive, two-day program, run annually, covers a variety of leadership topics that aim to develop the next generation of Spiire leaders. “[The program] is just one of many professional development initiatives offered to our team, which is a point of difference in the consulting industry and something we intend to keep building on.”

For the future, Mark plans to focus on growing the company, both geographically and by

diversifying into new market segments. “Certainly, our plans are to continue to grow the business and focus on what we do well, which is in the property space. But we still see a lot of opportunity to grow the business within that, even in our current geographic coverage. A lot of our clients have a national presence, or at least a presence in other parts of Australia—we want to explore potential opportunities in new locations to expand the business.

“A big part of Spiire’s future growth relies on aligning ourselves with the right partners. Our partnership with Westpac gives us the confidence to achieve that growth. When other institutions said no, Westpac said yes—they took the time to understand our vision and looked beyond the pure financials to see the big picture.

“The business can only continue to grow with strong relationships and good people. The investment we’re putting into the team—developing and growing the team,—is about that. With growth comes a lot of opportunity. When people ask why we keep wanting to grow, it’s actually creating those opportunities. And, hopefully, having a lot of fun at the same time!” •

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