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Taking care of business

DNW Group is committed to making a positive impact by bringing innovation to the property and care industries.

IMAGES SCOTT EHLER

As a young entrepreneur making his mark on the business world, DNW Group CEO Dean Willemsen is the first to admit his journey has been a learn-as-you-go experience. But with his infectious personality and commitment to making a difference to the community at large, the 30-year-old is making waves in the property and care sectors.

"I am a firm believer in the need to have a healthy mind and body," Dean says. "It was my wife who convinced me to take up yoga, which led me to meditation. I wanted to learn more about myself and my thought processes, so recently I travelled to India. It was a profound experience that taught me to be curious and open minded. I am not always going to get it right, but I am committed to surrounding myself with exceptionally talented people to help me."

Not only did Dean return home with a clearer understanding of what type of leader he wanted to be; he also became a qualified yoga instructor and can be occasionally found passing on his learnings to the team at Prime Build, his first company.

Dean began his career studying horticulture at university, but he quickly realised it wasn't for him. He left and went to TAFE to complete a diploma in construction. His desire to get his hands dirty through experience led him to begin a construction apprenticeship, and upon completion he followed it up with a certificate III in carpentry. Dean worked his way from the bottom up, >>



Name Dean Willemsen
Company DNW Group
Position Founder and CEO
HQ Sydney, Australia
Employees 75

and this has stood him in good stead today. “That has been my approach,” he explains. “Understanding the grass roots of what we are trying to achieve, what our customers’ needs are, and then being able to be effective from there.”

The last five years have seen Dean expand his investments in both property and care companies. Clearstate, the property development company, has interests in Western Sydney and Melbourne. “We feel the Aussie dream of owning a home has become too difficult, and we are looking at innovative ways to change that,” Dean says.

Recently, the acquisition of Para Mobility has added to the care portfolio. “Acquiring Para Mobility fits nicely with our core value of improving the lives of others. We want to ensure independence is something all Australians have, and now we have the opportunity to provide mobility solutions as a custom offering or as an integrated solution as part of our development projects.”

In 2013, Dean recognised he needed to bring the portfolio family together. Thus DNW Group was formed to bring corporate support and governance to the expanding group of businesses. The journey led to the introduction of like-minded investment partners, and therefore needed a framework of principles to ensure sound management and financial success. He gained a wealth of experience from founding the construction company, Prime Build, and felt it was a natural move to set up the shareholding entity and advisory board that is DNW Group. Under the Group’s banner, there are several divisions. In property, there are five categories: construction, land subdivision, services, agribusiness, and finance. In care, there are currently two: aged and health, and, in the future, child.



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- Dean Willemssen

Dean teamed up in 2008 with good friend Tim Thompson—who had retail construction experience—to launch Prime Build. “We were the new guys on the block, and we weren’t even aware of what some of the bigger and more established companies did every day. We made it up as we went, and by default really founded our business on innovation without even knowing it,” he laughs. “I should probably claim to have done some big market plan, but there was nothing other than having a beginner’s mind and approaching problems with a large degree of openness. We simply listened to our customers to learn what they needed and developed solutions that delivered.”

In 2012, Prime Build was successful in winning a contract to refurbish the Kmart stores across New South Wales and the ACT; then, 12 months later, went on to win the contracts for Victoria and Tasmania, which gave the



business a huge boost. Prime Build was able to craft a strong reputation in the marketplace. This success led to Dean’s other business ventures such as Flexi Solutions and Clearstate, and now DNW Group, which continues to go from strength to strength.

When talking technology and innovation, it’s hard not to notice Dean’s passion. “Technology is something everyone likes to talk about, and I am a big believer that the best technology is the technology that you don’t even know exists. It needs to be a catalyst for innovation and efficiency rather than technology for technology’s sake. We cannot make a difference in our industries by operating business as usual; we need to look to new technologies to innovate and progress. BAU should be a thing of the past; changing habits through innovation



can give our customers a seamless experience. By nature, being a younger company, we have always been very technology driven, and we look for solutions that bring our procedures and programs to life. It’s a big focus for us because it offers consistency and empowers our teams. It’s an exciting time for us; we are not completely there yet, but it is the beginning of a new era.”

“DNW is one of our fastest growing and most dynamic relationships. They’re free thinkers, take a long-term view and are crystal clear about what they value in their business partners—this provides a great foundation for trust and teamwork.” - Ben Burney, Partner, Sparke Helmore Lawyers

Dean says the foundations for the culture of the group began with Prime Build, whose people fittingly built the culture. It is their infectious nature of living and breathing exceptional customer experiences that empowers the DNW leadership team to do the same. This, he believes, has been a key factor in being able to attract and retain talented workers. “A fundamental part of how we work is to be passionate and restless in our search for continual improvements and services that will hopefully delight our customers. We get our hands dirty; we get involved in grass-root systems that actually make a difference to people’s lives, and I think that’s why we are able to inspire and keep such amazing talent in our team. We are doing what we do for the right reasons.” This element has also been a key factor in why DNW Group decided to make its foray into the care sector.

As well as having great respect for his employees, Dean has also developed robust relationships with his supply chain and other corporate partners. One mutually beneficial connection has been with Sparke Helmore Lawyers. “They have been a great support across all our businesses,” Dean notes. “The team has been instrumental in structuring the group and for getting us organised from both a legal and a tax perspective. They have been an essential part of our success, and we look forward to continuing our relationship.”

The priority now for DNW Group is to keep getting better—to excel in its core business functions and deliver continuing growth to its investors. “We’re passionate about everything we do, and can deliver outstanding results for our stakeholders and customers. We want to lead by example.” ■



A quick chat while surfing at Manly led two strangers, Sparke Helmore’s Ben Burney and DNW’s Lachlan Cameron, to forge the start of a great relationship between DNW Group, a fast growing innovator in the property and care sectors with a free thinking, flexible, go for it spirit that’s embodied in its youthful founder and Sparke Helmore, a law firm that knows how to get on with business. Ben says “Working with DNW is a lot like surfing - you wait for the best waves, size them up and then go for them.” Is this the way you like to do business? Email ben.burney@sparke.com.au to start a conversation, it doesn’t have to happen in the surf.

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