

BRW, 25/08/2011

WINNER: UNITISED BUILDING

Melbourne architect Nonda Katsalidis and entrepreneur Marc Johnson started Unitised Building in 2008 to overturn the long-held bias against pre-fabricated multi-storey apartments.

Using proprietary technology in a factory in Melbourne's west, the company manufactures apartments from concept to lock-up, then places them on site. Unitised Building displayed its market advantage by delivering 199 apartments in nine months, a short time frame in the best of circumstances let alone amid all the rain of the past year that typically holds up construction. The project, called The Nicholson after the inner suburban street that is its home, was developed by the VicUrban authority.

The construction industry is conservative. It is dependent on a

risk-averse banking sector. The past few years have made the banks more nervous than usual. Johnson must first convince developers, their architects and their engineers to rethink their attitude to pre-fab building techniques and then try to convince the banks not to add a risk margin to their lending.

Unitised Building builds its apartments using steel instead of concrete, reducing the cost of foundations because the whole building is lighter. That has helped it to beat a path through the sceptics and achieve its remarkable growth rate of 414 per cent in the past few years to reach \$48 million in revenue.

Smartest move: Bidding for The Nicholson, in Coburg. It was risky as a complex building, not specifically designed for Unitised Building and an

outrageous time frame. It proved our flexibility; it put us on the map.

Growth tip: Plan for modest growth; keep costs down to compete.

Biggest mistake: We hired a lot of smart people from other industries before we could use them effectively. Learning manufacturing processes from the ground up takes time.

How will your company stay ahead: Keep costs down, continue to create better designs and new products and develop relationships with builders, who are our clients.

FASTEST GROWING PRIVATE BUSINESS (TURNOVER < 100M)

Winner: Unitised Building (Australia)

Finalists:

Eylex
iSelect
Longwarry Food Park
SpinTel
Sun Connect
ZEN Home Energy Systems

