



Contractor Interview

How to secure the successful project?

Construction projects can return high profit margins and build the profitable business. However, there are various risks that can decrease project yields or make them negative. Profitability is connected with proper planning, setting a right and competitive project margin at the time of tender and the professional execution of all project phases. Doing it right requires the experience and knowledge.

Artur Walenda, the Managing Director of construction company Silver Horizon, explains how to secure the successful project and build the profitable business.

How long have you been in the construction business? In what types of projects do you specialise?

15 years. Including 12 years in the UK. I started with small projects of Kitchens and Bathrooms. In the course of time they grew into bigger ones. Presently I specialise in: general house refurbishment, loft conversion, house extension and new dwellings. I'd like to add that designing and installation of bathrooms, wet rooms and kitchens are still my favourite types of projects.

What is your background and experience in the construction industry?

I studied for 4 years construction industry at the faculty of Civil Engineering at Krakow Technical University. At the same time I founded a construction company in the UK which I manage until this day. For a few years I have been cooperating with architects and people who deal with developer projects and this was the greatest school of life and the most difficult experience. Each day may be surprising and it still brings on new experiences.

What are the keys to successful project execution?

Interpersonal communication. The dialogue with a client, employees, architects. And with all the peo-

ple who work together on a joint project at a given moment. Proper organisation of duties and executing them on proper time and with a proper advance. And the quality, which will be our showcase long after the completion of the project.

Which business practices result in the greater profitability?

The greatest profit is the smile of a satisfied client. A client's satisfaction is more precious than the money earned. I'm a proponent of gradual enrichment where the goal is the perspective of further and constant development and broadening of your mind. Those who want to enrich themselves fast, end up their careers quickly.

How to be competitive during the tender process?

There are different methods to lower the price in the preliminary reading. Providing the low price and adding next to it PS – Provisional Sum – enables to achieve low final price and thereby the possibility to win the tender. When the project is going on, the PS may reach much higher level and in this way the contingency, which is the provision for unforeseen expenditures, diminishes in an express pace and the costs of the whole project rise. Personally I have experienced using such methods and I find them disappointing for all the parties. It's better to lose 9 tenders out of 10, than to lower the prices in order to win as many tenders as possible.

How do you improve project control?

I use an old-school method, the board and self-adhesive small sheets of paper with assigned tasks for particular days and weeks. The information writ-



ten on them enable to control the scope of works and to meet the deadlines. It's clear to the labourers who plan their subsequent tasks according to it. It also gives a client the idea about the subsequent stages of work. The small sheets contain information about all deliveries, appointed meetings, inspections, trainings and subsequent stages of works. The work schedule in Excel keeps guard over all of it which I update 2 or 3 times a week.

How do you organise the scheduling of works on a project and what steps do you undertake in case of delays?

My experience allows me to plan the deliveries of the most important elements (such as bricks, windows, kitchen) of a project well in advance. Setting the specifics of finishing the details at the



preliminary stage and during a project is also a key factor and it has an influence on the completion date. Starting the talks with utility providers (National Gas Grid, UK Power Networks, Thames Water, BT) at the preliminary stage of a project will help to avoid unnecessary delays. Delays are caused by many factors and one can't always avoid them. When such delays occur, you have to roll up your sleeves and work even harder for the quality without compromise.

How can you predict risks in the expected project profitability? How to apply the necessary changes to project execution before it is too late?

Providing for Contingency Sum in the contract for unexpected expenditures is a certain provision. There are always some additional costs and one has to be prepared for them. The best way to minimize the losses is to meet the deadline and to make sure there is a proper number of labourers who are

needed for a particular project. It sounds simple, but it's not always that simple.

In your opinion what is the most difficult part of the construction project - establishing relations with the client or architect, managing team and deadlines, implementing changes in the building contract, or meeting the requirements of Building Regulations?

Throughout the course of the whole project there are many emotions, including uncertainty. Maintaining client-contractor relations with the sense of security and trust is a key challenge. In order to achieve this goal I regularly meet with a client and/or architects in order to maintain the dialogue, to show which of the works have been completed and which of them require action later on. A meeting is an ideal moment for answering the questions of all the parties, analysing the changes, if there are some and setting the goals for the next week. Two meetings in a month are necessary, though there are some projects in which I organise the meetings at least once a week, depending on the client's needs.

A direct contact and good relations with a construction site inspector are also a priority. I take into account all his remarks and comply with his recommendations. Thanks to it I am sure that apart from obtaining the Completion Certificate, I will also be qualified for London Building Excellence Awards by LABC.



Do you or your labourers take part in the training and qualifications upgrades to stay up to date with innovation and new technologies?

Once a month I carry out HSE training in accordance with the latest CDM regulations. We discuss the risk at work, the role of responsibility and scope of duties of each labourer. Each of the trainings is noted down, entered in the books and ready to be viewed in case of inspection.

Innovations and new technologies are the realm of architects, although I must say that I'm also interested in it and I never miss any exhibition in London or Birmingham, such as Ecobuild,

BuildShow, Homebuilding and Renovating Show or Ideal Home Show.

What is your opinion on Brexit and its influence on construction businesses?

I think that Brexit will not influence significantly the pace of development in construction sector. Perhaps the luxury finishing sector will slow down, but these are my personal speculations. Something very bad would have to happen in order to reverse the growth trend. The negative aspect of Brexit, which is already noticeable, is the lower activity of specialised workers in the market. The difficulty to find suitable workers

results in the complications in the completion of projects. There can be different consequences. Starting from the reduction of Polish companies in the market, ending with unwillingness to participate in tenders. To sum up, there will be much work, but there won't be enough workers.

What is your opinion on building contractors coming from EU? Do you think their presence is essential in the UK construction sector?

Our presence is crucial in the sector of small and medium projects. I don't maintain that we are indispensable, but I don't think that London could be developing



so beautifully without our participation. In the construction sector Polish workers are at the forefront in terms of quality, commitment and maximum effort that we put in order to achieve satisfaction and success. I hope that such an opinion, developed throughout the last decade or two, will be held many years from now.

When searching for building materials for your projects what are the most important factors that you consider - price, quality, availability, innovation, service and assistance, etc.?

The most important thing is to combine quality with the price. This is an inseparable connection. Good

quality materials don't need to be expensive or can be replaced with counterparts that are equally good. In most of the cases the availability of materials is subsidiary. The delivery that has been planned well in advance will enable to save up the costs, at the same time receiving good product on time.

Personally, I buy most of the materials from Polish wholesalers. And here the example of IBB Polish Building Wholesale is perfect. Competitive prices, speedy delivery and excellent customer service. There are also materials that I import from abroad. For example, windows from Germany or Lithuania. Kitchens and Bathroom furniture from Poland and Lithuania. Floors from

Poland. It is best to import from Poland heavier materials, such as cement blocks or reinforcement bars, if you need them in large quantities.

As the established and successful construction company, what tips do you have for new entrants into the sector?

Be open, but alert. Be flexible, but specific. Be creative and predictable. Respect people and earn other people's respect through hard work. Keep company with good people !!

Visit Silver Horizon website
www.silverhorizon.co.uk