

# Architects face tough times

Rhonon O'Brien

IT was with some interest that I read in *The Courier-Mail* recently that UDIA Queensland has released figures showing 8000 jobs from the construction sector have been wiped from the industry over the past three months – a figure which didn't surprise me at all.

We have been fortunate in that we have been able to secure work across a variety of sectors after the "completion" of the Federal Government's Building the Education Revolution program. Since the completion of this work, we have gained traction in the mining



accommodation sector, residential housing and affordable housing sectors, and there has been some strength in the interior design and fit-out arena. There has also been a significant increase in regional local government projects.

But we are aware of architectural firms which have had to lay off staff recently and we feel that the trend is continuing, with tough times still being

experienced by many architectural practices, especially in Queensland.

We see this most dramatically when we tender for work and consistently find some architectural practices bidding for that work by providing greatly reduced fees, while still claiming to be able to provide high levels of service, design competence, compliance and timely delivery.

We are finding this is one of the biggest challenges to our practice at present, as we walk the fine line of trying to provide a competitive fee, compelling value for money, while still meet clients' expectations on

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quality and deadlines. In some instances, we are finding that clients are choosing the extremely low bids, even though we know as architects that a fee of that level can only mean under-cutting (below cost), which can create negative experiences in the future. However, this is what some practices are needing to do to compete in today's market, or to keep themselves afloat.

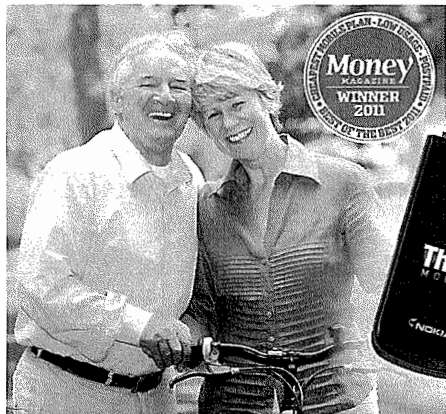
Our firm has decided to not under-cut for a variety of reasons, but mainly because we want to continue to invest in the development of training programs and the latest technology, which ensures ongoing

staff development. The under-cutting as we are seeing in the industry at present often results in poor design outcomes or the poor coordination of construction documents, which generates extra costs to the delivery of projects in the long run.

We look forward to hearing more from Premier Anna Bligh on strategies to assist builders and the construction industry with the Building Revival Forum in April.

Rhonon O'Brien is the managing director of Mode Design. Going Concern is a regular column. Anyone wishing to contribute, please contact Chris Herde on herdec@qnp.newsttd.com.au

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