

A family tradition of quality: Lawmans Frame and Truss

Navigating Challenges and Upholding Standards: Lawmans Frame and Truss Throughout 30 Years. **By Campbell McInnes**



Above: (Left to right) Manuel Mizzi, Frances Pearson, William Mizzi and Hayes Mizzi outside the Lawmans Frame and Truss office and factories, located in South Windsor, NSW.

Founded in 1994, by Lawrence and Manuel Mizzi, Lawmans Frame and Truss Pty Ltd the inception of the company arose from a vision to address the demand for exceptional frame and truss solutions in local and the wider metropolitan areas. With both founders being builders, Lawrence and Manuel's ability to comprehend and communicate effectively in the industry ensured accurate quotes and supply that met client expectations. Upon Lawrence's retirement in 2017, Manuel assumed full ownership, upholding the family legacy.

Maintaining a familial environment, Lawmans Frame and Truss proudly employs multiple family members across its office and factory floors. Currently spanning three generations, the family business sees Manuel's son William managing operations, daughter Frances overseeing finance and administration, and grandson Hayes, an estimator who worked his way up from the factory floor. Throughout its tenure, Lawmans has nurtured local talent and provided opportunities to young apprentices.

SUPPLY PARTNERS

One of the key's to Lawmans success lies in its partnerships with industry-leading suppliers like MiTek, OneFortyOne, Meyer Timber and NuPine. These partnerships have enabled Lawmans to ensure the high quality

and service upon which their clients rely. With a commitment to innovation, sustainability, and efficient logistics, Lawmans remains a trusted name in the timber industry.

MiTek who Lawmans partnered with at their inception, is a diversified global supplier specializing in software, engineered products, services and automated manufacturing equipment for residential construction industry. MiTek provides a technologically advanced, high-quality, and reliable approach to business workflow - as well as the design, manufacturing and construction of residential structures. This collaboration empowers Lawmans to deliver premium posi-struts, frames, and trusses, accompanied by unparalleled service and technical guidance, regardless of project size.

Lawmans have built strong relationships with OneFortyOne and chose them to be their main suppliers of MGP10 pine. OneFortyOne, is a forestry company, originated in 2012 after acquiring a lease of plantation assets in South Australia. Named after the 141st meridian east line, it is a major employer in the Green Triangle area, employing over 400 people directly and 1,000 indirectly. They acquired Mount Gambier's Jubilee Sawmill in 2018 and invested nearly \$40 million to enhance its efficiency. They also acquired Nelson Forests

Limited and Kaituna Mill in New Zealand, known for their innovation and environmental certifications. Starting with just five employees, OneFortyOne now employs over 500 individuals across

Australia and New Zealand, emphasizing responsible and sustainable operations, care for employees, the environment, and regional communities. Teaming up with One-Forty-One proved to be the right decision. William advised, recently when the supply of MGP10 became extremely tight, Lawmans secured the MGP10 they required, underscoring the strength of their domestic supply chain loyalty.

Another critical partner, Meyer Timber (formally Structalam Timber Products) has facilitated Lawmans' access to a diverse range of timber products. Structalam was established in 1988, as an active participant in the N.S.W Engineered Wood Products. Priding itself on technical expertise and a logistical service to match, Structalam built an excellent reputation. Purchased by the Meyer family in 2007 the now "Meyer Timber N.S.W" has grown into a more diversified wholesaler of timber products. Meyer's commitment to efficiency and logistics aligns seamlessly with Lawmans' operations.

Manuel added, we could not leave out Glen Donegal from NuPine as he is a standout figure for Lawmans, especially during times when timber scarcity and skyrocketing costs were prevalent. It was a reassurance to have aligned us with individuals who actively supported our endeavours. For over 25 years, Glen Donegal has been a primary timber supplier for Lawmans, and more than that, a cherished friend to our team.

POSI-STRUT

Posi-Strut floor and roofing systems are manufactured in Australia, by a number of licenced fabricators, including Lawmans. Manuel explained, they are a little more expensive than the alternative I-Joist, however, are still preferred by many clients due to their ease of installation, are much lighter than a traditional solid piece of timber and create a cavity between the webs. For the trades that follow, like electricians, air conditioning installers and plumbers, the posi-struts are a welcome sight as they make their jobs of running cables, pipes and tubing a breeze. Lawmans also offers I-Joist or solid



Above left: Infeed leading to the computerised Razor 5 saw, supplied by Vekta. **Above right:** FrameQuip frame line, which has been a welcomed addition particularly with the improvements seen in safety.



timber products, providing clients with a range of choices.

EFFECTS OF COVID-19

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, it appeared that individuals involved in the timber and construction sectors fared relatively well, as these industries were among the few permitted to operate while others were not permitted to trade. However, this was not the reality for many frame and truss manufacturing businesses like Lawmans. Manuel recounted how the pandemic severely impacted their operations. Despite the challenges, they prioritized retaining their staff and continued to provide salaries throughout the crisis. Although the government offered some financial aid for employee wages, it fell short of covering all expenses. Manuel emphasized that they still had to fulfill obligations such as taxes, superannuation, and workers' compensation, along with other fixed costs essential for running the business.

During the lockdown, logistical hurdles arose as certain staff couldn't commute due to restrictions on travel between different areas. Additionally, several scheduled jobs were postponed or cancelled, because the project sites were inaccessible for various reasons. Manuel mentioned a recent incident where they were requested to reevaluate a project originally quoted in 2019, which had been halted due to Covid-19-related issues.

While their workload significantly decreased, construction activities increased in other segments, causing a shortage of MGP10 timber in the market, due to overwhelming demand surpassing supply. Lawmans managed to secure sufficient MGP10 through their established loyalty within the domestic supply chain. However, the situation was different for Engineered Wood Products, primarily imported, where demand far exceeded available supply. Despite being able to produce posi-struts during this period, Lawmans still faced financial strain and found themselves operating at a loss, for the first time.

EMPLOYMENT CONCERNS

Amidst the post-Covid-19 environment, Lawmans and other smaller Frame and Truss plants confront a fresh wave of employment challenges. As the Australian market experiences a downturn, the jobs for all Frame and Truss companies have decreased. Larger fabricators, with higher overhead costs, require substantial throughput to reach their break-even point. Consequently, the softening market exerts significant pressure on prices. William disclosed that they are currently encountering competitors offering prices up to 25% lower than their quotes. Unable to match such steep reductions without sacrificing what margin they have; they are compelled to walk away from these jobs.

Manuel further elaborated that their typical success rate in quoting jobs stands at around 35%, which is commendable. However, this figure has plummeted to 5% amidst the current market conditions. Consequently, the Lawmans team is exerting extraordinary efforts to enhance their rate of successful bids.

Regrettably, in a soft market like the present one, many clients prioritize cost over quality and service. Despite being aware that cheaper frame and truss companies often compromise on quality and omit crucial elements from their quotes, some clients calculate a budget for their own builders to rectify any deficiencies from these lower-cost suppliers. William expressed concerns about this approach, questioning whether clients can identify and address every issue or omission and pondering the integrity of the structures if any aspect is overlooked.

STAFFING

Staffing remains a crucial aspect of business management, demanding considerable attention and effort. Today serves as a prime example, as William noted that approximately fifty percent of the twenty staff members scheduled for the factory floor were absent, also noting it was a Monday.

To address staffing challenges and streamline production, Lawman's opted to

invest in a Vekta Razor 5 computerized cutting saw. While these machines entail significant upfront costs compared to conventional docking saws, they offer numerous advantages. William highlighted that the Razor is notably faster, safer, space-efficient, marks cut timber, and requires fewer staff to operate. Operated by one person, occasionally two during peak workloads, the Razor replaces 3 to 4 docking saws and their associated staff.

Additionally, Lawmans boasts two FrameQuip Auto-Nailing framing lines (FrameQuip recently acquired by Vekta). These machines offer a significant safety advantage over manual nailing, with the potential to prevent injuries among staff, which is a top priority for Lawmans. The Auto-Nailing framing lines have been warmly welcomed and have effectively reduced the occurrence of staff injuries while handling the roughly 188,000 nails used annually.

PASSING ON THE BATON

William emphasized the invaluable comfort of having Manuel remain involved in the business. Manuel's years of experience and industry knowledge have proven to be a priceless asset, offering insights into both successful strategies and lessons learned from endeavours that didn't pan out as expected.

Reflecting on his own journey, Manuel expressed gratitude for having a mentor during the business's early stages. Transitioning into a more advisory role has presented challenges, particularly in relinquishing full control. Manuel acknowledged the diversity of approaches among team members and recognized that mistakes are inevitable. He emphasized the importance of learning from these experiences and moving forward collectively. Together, they will continue to grow and serve their customers with the highest level of quality and service.

In July of the current year, Lawmans Frame and Truss will mark its 30th anniversary, a remarkable milestone for a small, family-run enterprise. **T**

For more, visit www.lawmans.com.au

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