

SPECTRUM SPEAKS

The company
newsletter for
Spectrum Coach
& Spectrum
Lawyers



As the year draws to a close, Fred and I, representing Spectrum Group, extend heartfelt appreciation to our resilient clients who navigated the challenges of the past months. As the Holiday Shutdown approaches, we encourage you to reflect, recharge, and embrace the opportunities that 2024 holds.

In 2023, Spectrum Group experienced significant growth and personal milestones. Maria's commencement as a lecturer at RMIT marked a year of personal and professional development. We celebrated Hannah's wedding, fulfilling postponed dreams, and expanded our practice into conveyancing, property law, family law, and deceased estates. Our gratitude extends to our dedicated staff and Rosemary, your first point of contact.

A special thanks to DJM Building Consultants for introducing a staff benefit program, allowing us to provide conveyancing services and prepare Wills for their team. We appreciate clients who welcomed us into their businesses for tailored staff training and our staff who facilitated internal general counsel secondments.

Anticipation builds for 2024, with exciting plans to enhance our services. We'll be closed from December 15, 2023, reopening on January 15, 2024. Wishing you a joyful festive season and a well-deserved break.

The Team at Spectrum Group.

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Understanding Heads of Agreement: Navigating Legality in Construction Contracts

BY DONNA ABU-ELIAS

A Heads of Agreement, often utilised in the preliminary stages of a business arrangement, serves as a blueprint for parties before a more formal agreement takes shape. While the term "Heads of Agreement" is commonly used, it's essential to note that parties might employ various terms such as preliminary agreement, memorandum of understanding, or letter of intent.

In the construction industry, Heads of Agreement frequently play a pivotal role, especially in delineating terms for activities like site investigation works or early project development stages involving developers and builders.



The legal enforceability of a Heads of Agreement has long been a topic of debate. Courts often grapple with this question due to the informal nature of these agreements. The recent case of *Patel v Sengun Investment Holdings Pty Ltd* [2023] VSCA 238, heard in the Victorian Court of Appeal, exemplifies this complexity. The trial judge initially ruled against enforceability, emphasising the parties' intention to be bound only upon formal contract execution. However, the Court of Appeal took a different stance, deeming the Heads of Agreement a binding contract.

Elements influencing a court's determination of enforceability include:

- (a) Intention of the Parties: Did the parties immediately intend to be bound, or was their intention contingent upon formal contract execution?
- (b) Formality of Drafting: Is the Heads of Agreement highly formal, resembling a deed with detailed rights and obligations?
- (c) Contractual Intent: Does the document explicitly state an intent to be legally bound, referring to an 'entire agreement' or specifying a contractual relationship?
- (d) Clarity of Essential Elements: Are crucial elements (parties, price, subject, etc.) clearly and definitively outlined?
- (e) Time Sensitivity: Is time expressly defined as essential?

Each Heads of Agreement is unique, and the legal outcome depends on its specific wording. As you create your Heads of Agreement, consider whether you want legal enforceability.

Spectrum Lawyers & Consultants are here to guide you through the intricacies of drafting agreements, ensuring your intentions align with legal outcomes.

Selling in a Tough Market: Strategies for Success

BY FRED ABU-ELIAS

In the world of business, there are times when the market is booming, and sales are effortless. Then, there are those challenging periods when selling becomes an uphill battle. Whether it's due to economic downturns, increased competition, or unforeseen global events, navigating a tough market requires a strategic approach. In this article, we will explore the key strategies for selling in a tough market, offering valuable insights for business professionals looking to thrive in difficult times.

Before diving into strategies, it's essential to understand the landscape of a tough market. Such markets are characterized by reduced consumer spending, heightened price sensitivity, and increased competition. External factors like recessions, pandemics, or shifts in consumer preferences can contribute to market difficulties.

When you're aware of these challenges, you can better prepare and adapt your selling approach.

Here are some strategies to help you succeed in a tough market:

1. Customer-Centric Approach

In a tough market, it's more critical than ever to focus on your customers. Understand their needs, preferences, and pain points. Tailor your offerings to solve their problems. Listen to their feedback and adapt your products or services accordingly. Building strong customer relationships can be your lifeline during challenging times.

2. Differentiation

Standing out in a crowded and competitive market is crucial. Highlight what makes your product or service unique and superior to the competition. This could be a specific feature, superior quality, excellent customer service, or innovative solutions. Create a strong value proposition that resonates with your target audience.



3. Cost Control

In a tough market, cost control is vital for maintaining profitability. Review your operational costs and identify areas where you can reduce expenses without compromising quality. Streamlining your business processes and negotiating with suppliers for better deals can help you maintain a competitive edge.

4. Diversification

Relying on a single product or market can be risky in tough times. Consider diversifying your product line or expanding into new markets or customer segments. This can help mitigate the impact of market fluctuations and open up new revenue streams.

5. Adaptability

The ability to adapt to changing circumstances is a hallmark of successful businesses. Be ready to pivot your strategy when necessary. This could mean adjusting your marketing approach, exploring new distribution channels, or even changing your core offerings in response to market demand.

6. Market Research

Stay informed about market trends, customer behavior, and your competitors. Regular market research can help you make informed decisions and stay ahead of industry shifts. Tools like surveys, focus groups, and social media monitoring can provide valuable insights.

7. Effective Marketing

In a tough market, marketing becomes even more critical. While it may be tempting to cut marketing expenses, a well-thought-out marketing strategy can help you reach your target audience effectively. Focus on cost-effective digital marketing channels like social media, content marketing, and email campaigns to maximize your reach.

8. Customer Retention

Acquiring new customers can be more challenging and expensive during tough times. Therefore, prioritise customer retention. Provide exceptional customer service and consider loyalty programs or special offers to keep your existing customers engaged and loyal.

10. Sales Training and Development

Invest in the training and development of your sales team. Equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate a challenging market. Effective salespeople can uncover new opportunities and convert leads into customers, even in tough conditions.

11. Financial Prudence

Maintain a strong financial position by managing cash flow effectively. This includes monitoring receivables, managing inventory efficiently, and negotiating favorable payment terms with suppliers. A healthy financial foundation will provide stability during tough times.

12. Collaboration and Partnerships

Consider collaborating with other businesses in your industry. Partnerships can help you share resources, expand your reach, and weather market challenges together. Identify opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships that enhance your competitiveness.

13. Long-Term Vision

While it's essential to focus on immediate survival in a tough market, don't lose sight of your long-term vision. Stay committed to your business goals and continue to innovate and invest in your future, even during challenging times.

Conclusion

Selling in a tough market can be a daunting task, but with the right strategies and a customer-centric mindset, businesses can not only survive but also thrive. By understanding the unique challenges of a tough market, differentiating your offerings, and staying agile in your approach, you can position your business for success.

Remember that resilience, adaptability, and a commitment to your customers are key to enduring and ultimately thriving in difficult market conditions. Keep learning, stay informed, and never lose sight of your long-term goals. With these strategies in mind, you can face the toughest markets with confidence and emerge stronger on the other side.

The Role of Registered Building Surveyors: Frame & Approval Stages

BY MARIA FOKIANOS

Registered Building Surveyors (RBS) stand as guardians of safety and compliance in construction projects, with a pivotal role during the frame and approval stages. A pertinent question arises: should RBS professionals limit their inspections to the structural frame? Two significant Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) decisions provide valuable insights into this query.

O'Hehir v Building Practitioners Board (Review and Regulation) [2015] VCAT 113

Senior Member Eric Riegler's elucidation in O'Hehir v Building Practitioners Board clarifies that Section 34 of the Act does not confine inspections solely to the frame. The Act's definition of "building work concerned to be inspected" extends beyond specific elements, focusing on the entire work subject to the building permit. Regulation 901 emphasises notification stages rather than dictating what should be inspected. This interpretation aligns seamlessly with the Act's core objective: safeguarding the safety and health of building users.

Mazzeo v Camilleri (Building and Property) [2021] VCAT 150

The Mazzeo v Camilleri case reinforces the contractual duty of RBS to deliver building surveying services with reasonable care and skill, including inspections. Senior Member R Walker's decision emphasises that inspections should not be limited to any specific aspect.

"RBS professionals wield a critical role in upholding safety and compliance in construction projects."

The Act obligates the relevant building surveyor to inspect the entire building work as defined by the permit. The decision underscores the duty to compare the work with permit drawings and requirements for compliance.

The consensus from VCAT decisions is clear: RBS professionals are not confined to inspecting only the structural frame. Instead, their responsibility extends to the entirety of the building work specified in the building permit. This interpretation resonates with the overarching goal of prioritising the safety and health of building occupants.

In conclusion, RBS professionals wield a critical role in upholding safety and compliance in construction projects. Their inspections should encompass the entirety of the building work as defined by the permit. This approach, as clarified by VCAT decisions, ensures that constructions meet the required standards and regulations, assuring the safety of occupants and the broader public.



Decoding Victoria's Windfall Gains Tax: What Property Owners Need to Know

BY HANNAH SMITH

From July 1, 2023, Victorian property owners might find themselves facing a new fiscal challenge: the Windfall Gains Tax. This tax comes into play when certain land undergoes government-led rezoning, resulting in a taxable uplift value exceeding \$100,000. Given that the trigger for this tax is governmental rezoning, the when and if become variables beyond an owner's control.

Understanding Key Terms:

- **Rezoning:** An alteration to a planning scheme, placing the land into a different zone than its pre-amendment state. For instance, a shift from a farming zone to residential.
- **Taxable Uplift:** The difference in the land's capital improved value before and after rezoning, determined by the Valuer-General, Victoria.

Tax Rates:

- For uplifts between \$100,000 and \$500,000, a marginal rate of 62.5% on the amount exceeding \$100,000 applies.
- For uplifts of \$500,000 or more, the tax is set at 50% of the total uplift.

Practical Example: Let's consider a scenario where an existing home in a Farming Zone, valued at \$2,000,000, gets rezoned to a Residential Zone with a revalued capital improved value of \$6,000,000. The windfall gains tax, triggered by the \$500,000 uplift, would be calculated at 50% of \$4,000,000, resulting in a \$2,000,000 tax.

Exemptions and Concessions: Numerous concessions and exemptions exist, including those for residential land, transitional exemption, charitable land, and more.

Payment and Deferral: Owners must pay the tax upon rezoning, receiving an assessment from the State Revenue Office.

Payment can be deferred until a "dutiable transaction" occurs or 30 years post-rezoning, with potential interest charges.

Disputes and Objecting: Strict timelines apply for objecting to a Windfall Gains Tax Assessment, requiring objections within 2 months of the assessment date.

Sale Considerations: Unpaid windfall gains tax becomes a charge on the land, impacting property transactions. Vendors are obligated to disclose these liabilities during property sales. If deferring payment, unpaid liabilities show up on Land Tax Certificates requested by lawyers or conveyancers during property transactions.

Key Takeaway for Buyers and Sellers: Whether buying or selling property, thorough consideration of Windfall Gains Tax implications is crucial. Seek advice from accountants and legal professionals to navigate the complexities of this tax, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of obligations and potential liabilities.



Insights into Victoria's Building Legislation Amendment Act

BY DONNA ABU-ELIAS

The Building Legislation Amendment Act, having received Royal Assent on 6 June 2023, brings significant changes to the Building Act 1993 (Vic) and associated legislations, set to commence no later than 1 February 2024.

Here's a summary of the key amendments:

1. Building Monitor:

- Introduction of Division 3A in Part 12 of the Building Act establishes the role of the Building Monitor.
- The Building Monitor will advocate for domestic building consumers, advising the Minister for Planning on systemic issues faced by consumers and making recommendations for resolution.

2. New Categories of Building Practitioners:

- Section 3 of the Building Act expands the definition of 'building practitioner' to include building consultants, building designers, site supervisors, and project managers.
- Specific roles and responsibilities of these practitioners will be clarified in forthcoming regulations, likely including registration requirements.

3. Submission of Draft Building Manual:

- New sections 41A and 41B introduce a requirement for builders or applicants seeking an occupancy permit to submit a draft building manual for prescribed buildings to the relevant building surveyor.

- The manual is intended to encompass design, construction, and ongoing maintenance information. Detailed regulations will define the content and requirements of the manual.
- The building surveyor must approve the manual, with the builder subsequently providing it to the homeowner or owners corporation. Ongoing updates to the manual will be expected.

4. State Building Surveyor:

- Insertion of Division 3 in Part 12 establishes the statutory role of the State Building Surveyor (SBS).
- The SBS serves as the primary source of technical expertise for building and plumbing work, issuing binding determinations on the interpretation of standards and requirements.
- Aims to enhance regulatory oversight and support improvements to the building surveyor profession.

5. RBS Information Statements:

- Pending regulation enactment, Registered Building Surveyors (RBS) will be required to provide prescribed information statements about certain buildings to owners when issuing the building permit.
- These statements are anticipated to outline the roles and responsibilities of the RBS in relation to the specific building.

These legislative changes are poised to have a substantial impact on the building industry in Victoria, emphasising consumer advocacy, practitioner roles, and enhanced regulatory oversight.



SPECTRUM LAWYERS & CONSULTANTS

Spectrum Lawyers provide legal services with legal expertise across all areas of building & construction law.

Building and construction law

- To assist builders and/or owners efficiently resolve building disputes
- Developing streamline procedures and training to manage the spectrum of challenges in today's market
- Advising consultants and contractors on their legal obligations under the Building Act and Building Regulations
- Advising building surveyors on compliance issues
- Debt recovery
- Dispute resolution at private mediations, DBDRV, Tribunal and Courts
- Reviewing building contracts and advising on rights and obligations

Conveyancing

- Assisting clients with the purchase or sale of residential or commercial property

General Counsel Services

- Reviewing and advising on procurement contracts and licenses
- Advising on general business law and day-to-day business operation issues
- Drafting policies
- Reviewing and drafting policies and terms and conditions
- Negotiating contractual documents
- Providing training (contract law, Australian Consumer Law, advertising, warranty, etc.)

Probate, Wills and Powers of Attorney

- Administering estates
- Drafting Wills and Powers of Attorney to protect your family and assets

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SPECTRUM COACH

Spectrum Coach provides 5 core areas of service, Sales, Marketing, Operations, Home Designs and Business Coaching. They are designed to understand your business intimately, which allows us to provide the focused, dedicated support that we hold to high standards to all our clients. We understand that every business is different, and will have different needs. Choose one of our services or choose them all – whatever works for you and your business.

Sales

Without sales, you don't have a business. Our training gives you guidance at a micro level, arming you with specific strategies that are proven to close sales.

Operations

Your front end and back end operations are key to turning a profit. From taking the initial sale to getting to a site start, we have designed processes that are easily adopted to improve efficiencies, increase profits and help you to manage your jobs more effectively.

Design & Drafting

Our extensive design library has a range of plans you can use to sell your new homes which are fully customisable. Our training will equip you with the tools you need to sell these plans based on their respective features and benefits. Need a custom design? We can do that too.

Marketing

You're busy doing what you do best – building homes. Let our in-house team help you market your business so you can do more of what you love. We can guide you through marketing your brand, generating leads, and can even help you build a website. We can also manage your social media, including writing content and posting on your social media pages.

Business Coaching

We get it - running a new homes business is complicated. As the business owner, you have to be across every aspect, and not all of them are going to be your specialty. Our general business coaching gives you a team that are skilled in all areas of business, from construction to finance.

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