

AWS

HELPING FABRICATORS FUTURE-PROOF THEIR SUCCESS

Huge changes are happening in the world of window-and-door fabrication. Among these are the introduction of net-zero carbon-emissions targets by 2050, the massive economic impact of COVID-19, and rapidly evolving building Standards and Regulations. Coupled with the day-to-day challenges of book-keeping, managing staff, customer service and the actual job of fabricating, many small-to-medium fabricators recognise they need help to look at the bigger picture. This means working on the business not in the business.

On top of everything else, Regional Business Development Manager for AWS, Leah Thornton, says, 'The industry is under a lot of pressure, with the increase in demand due to the Home Builder Grant combined with shortages in staff, it's hard to maintain exceptional service and lead times. The squeeze on businesses and staff to perform is extraordinary. Now is the time to support our industry in any way possible, to ensure business owners are ready for the world as it is today – and, of course, the world of the future.'

FUTUREPROOF: A NEW WAY FORWARD

'In what can be described as fortuitous timing, AWS began formalising a program, two and a half years ago, just before COVID-19 sent the world into lockdown. The program is called FuturePROOF™. 'As the name implies, it's about working with AWS fabricators to future-proof their businesses so they can overcome challenges, grow and achieve their goals', she says.

Leah adds, 'Our fabricators are incredible people, they're passionate about their trade and have built their business from the ground up. They know the ins and outs of manufacturing and have learnt how to run a business and manage staff along the way. The benefit of the FuturePROOF™ program is that it's designed to help them step back and think about what's going on in their business right now, where they want to take their business, and come up with a plan to get there. It's clear cut, tailored to individual needs and offers a reliable path forward.'

Leah describes FuturePROOF™ as, '... a combination of business coaching and a self-help guide. While we help fill knowledge gaps, provide practical best practice examples and facilitate changes, the fabricators do the work themselves. They're independent and we respect that. FuturePROOF™ is AWS' attempt to help fabricators reach

their long-term aims for the business by breaking down goals into bite-sized chunks and checking in to monitor their progress and keep them accountable.'

While the program is ideal for businesses at any stage of their growth, Leah is particularly proud of the success they've achieved for new businesses that have just started in the industry. A 2019 Report from the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman, states that small businesses employing 0-19 people, only have a 59.7% rate of success. 'We want to give our fabricators every opportunity to succeed. FuturePROOF™ is about giving people a proper business plan and a solid foundation so they can defy those odds.'

'All of us in the industry should be better supporting people who have invested their lifesavings — not to mention blood, sweat and tears — into their business. The FuturePROOF™ program also makes good financial sense for AWS. Frankly, if we don't support our fabricators, we have no channel to market. What we want is for our fabricators to reach out to us for help. We have a plan and we're right behind them every step of the way.'



SUCCESS STORY 1: PORTLAND ALUMINIUM & GLASS (PAG)

Based in Portland and Warrnambool, Victoria, Portland Aluminium & Glass works with builders, architects and homeowners to deliver excellence at every level. The small, family-owned company joined the FuturePROOF™ program 18 months ago.

STANDING ON SOLID GROUND

Alex and Tory Robinson purchased Portland Aluminium & Glass just under three years ago. They were completely new to the industry, having worked previously in the agricultural sector. About 18 months ago, AWS approached the husband-and-wife team to see if they would be interested in participating in the FuturePROOF™ program. The Robinsons said yes, becoming one of the first FuturePROOF™ inductees.

Alex explains that the data benchmarking and goal setting around sales, profitability, market presence and staff welfare were particularly helpful. The guidance, he says, was exceptional.

'You can't run around like a headless chook for years. For us, FuturePROOF™ gave us a way to get a better idea of what we were doing right and what we could improve. It helped, and continues to help, us stand back and look at the forest, instead of one tree. It's good to really look at your business to get a sense of what's actually happening. For example, we had a surprise realisation that our thermally broken metal represented 45% of our business, so that was a hard fact we could work with to grow our bottom line. They also helped us get some real clarity around personnel pressure points.'

Alex is also a fan of the accountability provided by AWS. 'We have digestible steps we have to take, and AWS follows up with us to see if we're staying on track. Our business is better for it, and I applaud AWS for offering the FuturePROOF™ program to their fabricators.'



SUCCESS STORY 2: STYLERITE WINDOWS & DOORS

Stylerite Windows & Doors is a licensed fabricator of the Vantage and Elevate ranges of high-performance aluminium window and door systems. Since joining the AWS fabricator network, the company experienced a significant increase in purchases.

FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

According to Stylerite's owner, Brendan, 'Being part of the AWS network and the FuturePROOF™ program is invaluable. It gives us incredible insights into how, what and where the business is tracking and travelling now and into the future.'

Brendan's commitment to engaging with the Ballarat community has strengthened local relationships and built a loyal customer base and awareness of his brand. As a result, an influx of custom builders is now choosing Stylerite as their preferred fabricator. The ownership structure of the business also changed in February 2021, when Brendan bought out his business partners and increased his ownership to 100%.

Since then, the business has enjoyed substantial increases in revenue when comparing 2018 to 2021, despite the pandemic. Brendan has also increased staff from three factory workers and two sales staff to 18 factory workers and six sales staff.

On the strength of his booming business growth, Brendan has moved his five-year business plan up to 12-18 months. He is in the process of acquiring new land and is proposing to construct a purpose-built factory, to be up-and-running by June 2023.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR FUTUREPROOF™

'At its core FuturePROOF™ will continue to maintain relevance, be adaptable and most importantly provide a sounding board to our fabricators.' Leah added 'The key to its ongoing success will rely on these factors, along with keeping up to date with what's happening in the industry and across the globe. FuturePROOF™ will continue to evolve.'



ABOUT LEAH

Leah Thornton is the Regional Business Development Manager at AWS, with over 19 years' experience in just in time manufacturing and operations. Applying lean manufacturing and six sigma skills to analyse, solve problems, improve business performance, and create a great customer experience. She transforms business strategy into strategic operational plans with targets and key objectives, which cascade to team goals; successfully turning around productivity, customer service and WHSE performance.

For more information, please contact marketing@awsaustralia.com.au