

A Badge of Honour

Integrity and family are vital values for South Australian-owned construction company BADGE Group.

Images Courtesy of BADGE Group



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Under the leadership of Managing Director Jim Whiting, BADGE Group has grown substantially over the past three decades. With offices in Adelaide, Brisbane, Maroochydore, and Perth and projects across Australia, BADGE is a prominent, private player in the construction space. Jim recently sat down with *The CEO Magazine* to discuss the group's impressive journey.

The CEO Magazine: How did you first get involved with BADGE?

Jim: I've been with BADGE for 30 years. Prior to that, I started off doing architecture at Adelaide University. I figured out that it wasn't quite my cup of tea, so I had a year off doing labouring and construction work.

I enrolled in Building Technology—now titled Construction Management—at the University of South Australia. I got a degree, and then worked for a building materials company where I trained across the business to be a manager.

A few years later, the company was taken over and one of my co-workers, Barry, said, "Bugger that; let's do our own thing." We all left on 1 July 1983 and started BADGE, which at the time was an acronym for Barry, Alan, David, Graham, and Brian. Jim didn't really fit into the acronym, so I missed out. We were

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just looking for a name to start trading and that's how we came up with BADGE.

After four years, all the other guys left the business. I've got seven brothers, and my family bought some of the company and I bought some more, so today my brothers and I own the organisation; however, none are in the organisation from a day-to-day point of view.

We started off with those six guys, known as the Badgers, and we're now at around 240 employees.

With BADGE Group's family roots, what are the company's core values?

Our key word is integrity. The building game is a tough, adversarial industry. If you're going to play that game and you don't have integrity, then it's just not going to work. You've got to have tough dealings with people, but you've got to be straight up and down with them. It doesn't work otherwise. At the level we work at, you've got to maintain your integrity or you won't be around much longer.

Over the past three decades, what have been the greatest challenges you've faced?

Over 30 years, it has been up and down. That initial bit when you start is probably the biggest challenge. When you start a business, I think

that ignorance is bliss to some degree; you're just running on energy and enthusiasm. There's so much energy going into it. There was a period in the late 80s with high interest rates, which was very hard.

Getting bigger has its own challenges as well. You've got to keep people productively employed.

What have been your proudest accomplishments while at the helm of BADGE Group?

Having a lot of longstanding employees and building the business has been satisfying, along with seeing people progress through the company and develop their careers. I think the biggest pleasure for me is just seeing people develop and carve out a good career within our organisation.

What can you tell us about the relationship between BADGE and Evans Harch?

We had an operation in Brisbane for quite a while, but we probably hadn't expanded it as much as we wanted to. The opportunity to look at Evans Harch came about through a connection I have with a fellow that I sit with on a charity board in Adelaide.

I had never really considered an acquisition before, but it turns out I'd met Trevor Harch and Pat Evans when I was president of Master Builders in Adelaide and Pat was president in Queensland. >





I had a catch-up with Trevor, who was running the sales side, and we worked out pretty quickly that we were of the same mind. We had very similar company cultures and we wanted the best for both businesses. The acquisition probably took around six months.

How would you characterise your relationships with suppliers and subcontractors?

We're still dealing with the same people we dealt with 30 years ago. Often, what you do changes, and

the work that they can do changes as well. Having relationships with subcontractors and suppliers is everything in our game. If you haven't got good relationships with your subcontractors, you haven't got much at all.

How do you manage to balance your work life with your personal life?

I don't; just ask my wife! I've got four kids, two girls and two boys, and I've been married to my wife for 28 years. It's great having that support.

Now that you've been around for 30 years, what does the future hold for BADGE Group?

It's tough at the moment, but these are the times when great opportunities exist. We've got quite a few new clients. Our longevity, our track record, and our size all accumulate and make people want to deal with us. In this market, that integrity and credibility is more and more important. We think we're in a really good spot.

While it is tough in the Australian market, being private gives us the ability to move quickly. That flexibility is a key point of difference for us. There aren't many large, private construction groups. We're the largest commercial, South Australian-owned construction company. I think that gives us a lot of flexibility. That's not everything, but it's a good place to start. •

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Smith Brothers Group

AN INSPIRING CEO AND KEY CLIENT OF THE SMITH BROTHERS GROUP

Jim Whiting is an inspiring CEO whose values and principles I have admired in our association over many years. As owner and managing director of the Smith Brothers Group—South Australia's major plumbing and pipeline business and one of Australia's largest—I have been involved with Jim on a number of major construction projects in Adelaide such as the Murray Bridge Market Place, prison facilities, shopping centres, and hospitals. Working with Jim and his professional

team at Badge is always seamless as they understand our business and are direct in all aspects and negotiations. The construction industry is struggling, but solid and financially stable businesses like Badge and the Smith Brothers Group keep forging ahead to lift above the rest.

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