

## The invisible force



The Rock  
the new Wellington Airport  
international terminal

**Garth Palmer, founder and co-director of Impact Project Management in Wellington, says that the better a project management company does its job, the more 'invisible' they tend to be.**

"The more smoothly a project is running, even a major one, the less you hear about it," he says. "That's our role – working with clients from planning and design through to completion, and managing the complexity of building projects by applying our knowledge and experience to getting the job done on time and on budget."

Impact's reputation has grown steadily since Garth, who gained his formal qualifications and project management experience in Australia, launched the business in 1999. Key projects include the internationally acclaimed Department of Conservation's head office fitout in Wellington, the first building in New Zealand to incorporate the Green Star rating. Others range from the Boulcott Village Apartments in Wellington to the long-term PSIS rollout, which has included the group refurbishing and expanding its branches nationwide.

Current major projects include the National Library Building redevelopment, Wellington Airport's international terminal, the new Whanganui District and High Court, and Gisborne District Court extension.

### Level and breadth of experience

Garth says that the

key differences that have contributed to Impact's success include the level and breadth of experience of the team members – spanning from 13 to 38 years. David Weir, who was appointed a director in 2007, brought extensive international experience in Europe and South Africa to the mix. His blue-chip clients had included Marks & Spencer, Hard Rock Café and Rank Group holdings.

"We pick our team members for their differing expertise in various backgrounds, such as engineering, quantity surveying, architectural and building," says Garth. "We also have a lot of international experience. Currently, our team members include Kiwis and also people from Australia, the UK, Sweden and South Africa."

Impact provides independent project management services, largely to corporate and government clients throughout New Zealand, although they also work with some developers. "We specialise in planning and managing building and infrastructure development clients from planning and design through to completion," Garth says. "We have a very strong track record in project



**Garth Palmer, founder and co-director of Impact Project Management**

managing high-profile complex construction and infrastructure projects. We plan our projects, create a win-win scenario, focus on complete design, closely monitor programmes and micro-manage cost."

Impact also provides specialist consulting advice in the areas of infrastructure development, including the Resource Management Act (RMA), civil engineering, seismic and structural and environmentally sustainable design (ESD).

"Our major philosophy is independence. We seek to find the best solution for a client in terms of strategy and delivery. While we foster very good working relationships with all our team members, we actively maintain our independence too so we can continue to work in the interests of our clients."

### Meticulous planning

Garth says that the DoC project, incorporating Green Star technology into an existing building that had been completely gutted, was a valuable learning experience. "We managed the design, procurement, fitout, furniture, fittings and equipment. We also had the logistically challenging task of relocating 320 staff in one weekend from three different sites. It was all achieved through meticulous planning."

Daily tasks for the team range from regular client meetings to procuring design consultants, or chairing design meetings or specialist project workshops. Tender or contract documents need to be prepared for main building contractors, and there will also be regular site meetings, inspections, issue of instructions and/or variations of contract to deal with.

One of Impact's major recent projects has been the new substations/track circuits/distant junction motorised isolator for KiwiRail in Wellington, including managing construction of 11 new substations on nine different sites over a very short 10-month construction period. "We are particularly pleased that, during this intensive construction period for the substations, there was no damage to services and no delays caused by the project we were working on," says Garth.

Challenges involved in achieving this in the short construction period included buried critical services in unknown positions at several sites. These signals, fibre optics and high-voltage cables were located safely using a large vacuum cleaner truck which removed the material around a service without damage.

At one site, a fibre optic cable clashed with the building footprint. Impact avoided a \$15,000 bill and six-week wait for it to be moved by negotiating with KiwiRail to move the building 100 mm away from the cable.

Another site had multiple live cables and could not be moved. Impact, with the assistance of the contractor and designer, devised a protection system to keep them intact as the building was constructed on top.

### Rick identification and mitigation

Impact is also project director for 'The Rock', the high-profile Wellington International Airport Terminal – where the necessary alterations to fuel hydrants threatened to cause delays.

"The hydrants are owned by Joint User Hydrant Installation (JUHI) and land is leased through Wellington Airport," explains Garth. "In order to alter the fuel hydrants, a separate agreement was entered into between JUHI and Wellington Airport to design and install

new hydrants. We could not risk a similar scenario as at Adelaide Airport where their new terminal opening was delayed because of fuel contamination."

Garth says that the most challenging aspect of project managing major contracts is managing clients/stakeholders and their expectations, particularly in a changing economic and political environment.

"Basically you have to identify risks early and mitigate them, and find problems before they find you," he says. "It is important to fully understand what the clients' needs are. Communication with stakeholders and within the stakeholder groups is vital. You are working to lead a disparate bunch of people towards a common goal, so you need to use good judgment – all of the time."

"You do need to be a particular kind of person to work in this field. You have to be a people person and enjoy communicating, but be a good listener – a clear and logical thinker – one that is versatile, decisive, and able to make decisions."

"It's incredibly satisfying to see a project through from conception to completion. The challenging parts can be the most rewarding. You are seeing clients realise dreams that may have been years in the making – and you hold the ability to add value."