

Remit Case Study: Aspers Group Limited

There aren't many opportunities that are genuinely once in a working lifetime affairs - but that's exactly what casino operator Aspers had the good fortune to be faced with in 2010. The company had been granted the prospect of expansion through the 2005 legislation that opened the way for new casinos in the UK: 8 large ones, and 8 smaller ones. The cherry would be the only large casino to be permitted in London, in the Borough of Newham.

"It was a big prize," says Deborah Roil, Development Director of Aspers: and it was one the company was absolutely determined to win. Aspers had agreed to put together a bid with Westfield, for a casino in the Stratford centre, to be open before the Olympics swept into town.

By 2010, Newham Council was ready to invite bids but new Government legislation meant it had to use a different application process, one previously untried in this country. The application pack specified a huge range of legal, financial, architectural and operational detail to be provided to enable the council to make its decision. Roil was determined to make the best possible bid she could, as the assessment process would depend on that single submitted application document.

"I realised I would need assistance getting it done on time, to the quality we felt we needed to win the bid," said Roil. "And that needed to be someone I could trust to run the project as I would, while liaising with the council, our lawyers, their lawyers and everyone involved."

The choice was quickly made: Remit Consulting.

"Remit has specialist Project Management skills, and I'd worked previously with Melita Thomas, one of the Partners. I needed somebody who could project manage - really project manage, not just tick boxes - and I knew I could rely on her and Remit to do that and to keep me up to date."

That meant Thomas working in Aspers' office, because the company was taking this project very seriously. This was to be an especially-created, unique bid document (published at a quality that would make some art book publishers rather envious), not just an aggregation of existing information about the company and its approach.

"This wasn't a remote project consultancy role," says Roil. "This was full-on, hands-on project management."

The finished document was divided into nine sections, all held together in a beautifully produced ring binder, with a set of DVDs containing an electronic version of the submission and supporting movies in the back.



"I needed someone to work with me I could trust to make the same decisions I would when I wasn't there" **says Roil.**

"Melita treated the project as if it were her own document, with that same level of personal commitment."

Each section could easily be removed and handed to a different member of the council's bid team for assessment.

"We wanted it to be visually exciting but still cohesive," says Roil. "It needed to speak with one voice." With over 20 people involved in producing the document, that was quite a challenge.

As each section of the document approached completion, the co-ordination task became massive. Roil had to know exactly what stage each set of copy was at, who was reviewing it, and who was yet to review it.

As Roil puts it, the benefit of Remit's approach and Thomas's experience was the difference between finding out that there's a problem with a section of the document when it fails to arrive on deadline, and being in touch with progress at every stage and spotting an issue before it became critical – and resolving it.

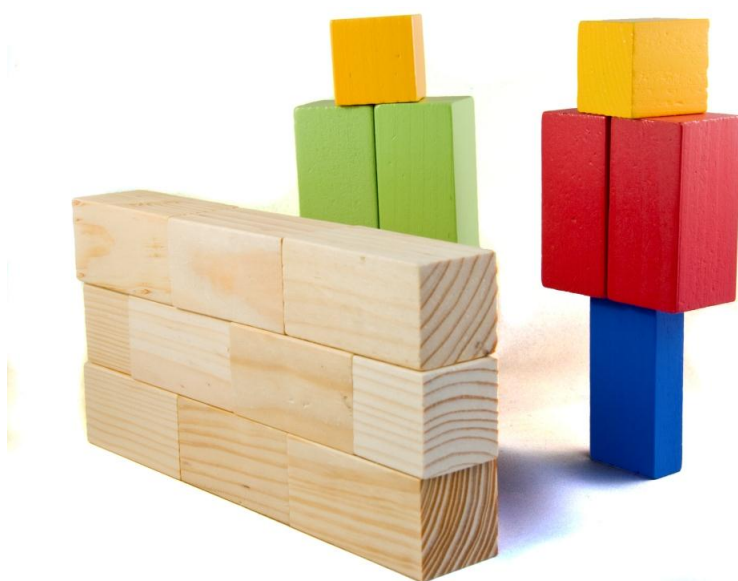
As well as working with key internal staff - Human Resources, the Financial Director and the Operations Director, for example, they also had to work with around ten people at Westfield, and key people at Crown, one of Aspers' shareholders, which is based in Australia. Remit's approach to involving all stakeholders came into play, blending each contribution into something that was coherent and seamless, and managing input from all parts of the business.

"We had no time for anyone to be a prima-donna," says Roil "There was huge pressure from all parts of the business, and not everyone can produce such great results under that level of scrutiny."

The drive for quality in the finished product led to the team having to make some quick decisions. For example, the initial set of CGI images from the architects lacked convincing images of people playing in casinos, so they had to arrange a photographic shoot at another property in Northampton, which provided a special set of images – largely of Aspers staff - to be worked into the final renders.

Another photographer was commissioned to shoot images in and around Stratford - but with a very specific brief. There could be no images of children, or of brands. Once the images arrived, there came the process of selecting and choosing which would best support each section of the finished document.

"We had to make decisions like 'do we reset the application form to match the rest of the submission'," says Roil. "The answer, we decided, was 'yes'." More time, more effort - "It takes time to do things concisely," says Roil, with some humour – but the results were worth it. Once the bid process was complete, Roil had informal feedback from the council that theirs was the most professional submission.



"We needed someone who was a good writer, who could take feedback well, and act on it quickly and was a great team worker" **says Roil.**

The team's experience with producing work at this level led them to leave a little extra time between the delivery of the finished books and the submission date. It was needed - some books had to be reprinted, and they asked for a complete reprint of those books rather than risking any mistakes being made in swapping out pages. In the end, Aspers' lawyers delivered the books - by van - and had them signed for.



The bid was won – and the casino opened in December 2011. Some industry observers had been sceptical about the estimated trading figures in the bid document, but a delighted Roil points out that they've already exceeded the target: they had 30,000 people through the door in the first three days, and 150,000 in the first month.

When the opportunity came up to bid for another casino in Milton Keynes, Aspers was keen to do so - but Roil had a problem. She was busy with the opening of the Stratford Casino, so she turned again to Remit and Thomas, who ran the creation of a second bid document. It was based on the first, but that was less of an advantage than it seemed.

"We decided to reuse the format, but we had to recreate most of the content, because Milton Keynes were asking for very different sets of information, in a different structure," says Roil.

And so Remit was running the creating of a second bid document, with Thomas reporting to Roil – but with day-to-day control. The result?

Aspers will open their latest casino – in Milton Keynes – early next year.

For more information:

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