

Q &



Media



Andrew Crosby from Xpect catches up with **Jarrold Renall** and **Peter Melrose**. We discuss how they had a problem in their consulting business and have now used technology enhanced with AI to provide a solution – and now it's for available for the rest of us to use.

In today's Q&A we talk about productivity, technology, the entrepreneurial journey and where those three have combined into Jarrod's and Peter's latest AI venture.

ZIPPP

OK Gentleman, nice to meet you both. Now I know you are dying to tell me about this fantastic new application you have both built, but let's step back for a moment. We don't want to make this some boring story about two guys who had a real problem in their business, harnessed Artificial Intelligence, and developed a solution that makes your team more productive, keeps clients happy and saves a bundle of cash do we?

Jarrodd: ummmm.

Peter: ahhhhhh.

Surveying. You guys are both surveyors, right? Land surveyors, measuring hills and setting out buildings, sorting out boundaries and the like I mean. Please tell us a little bit about what you do and your company.

Jarrodd: Yeah, we cover these things and a fair amount more than that, but yes, I am the Director of Survey Worx. To put it simple with surveying, we help clients locate or capture positions of matter. We have about 100 staff and 11 locations. 60 staff in our Penrose HQ and the rest dotted around the country.

Peter: And I'm the Director of Survey Group. We are a lot smaller with about 15 employees, but we do similar work for somewhat similar clients.

Ok, compete head-to-head on jobs?

Peter: Absolutely we are always trying to deliver better service than Jarrodd!



Peter Melrose (left) & Jarrodd Renall (right)

So, two competitors have joined forces then presumably to fight evil – how does that come about?

Peter: Me and Jarrodd have been mates for 20 odd years so we are always talking about our problems and how we think we can improve. Jarrodd took a bit of the lead on this project, and I thought we can help make this idea a reality.

Jarrodd: Peter has been an influential sounding board throughout the entire journey. I think that it is critical to have someone to bounce ideas off. And it helps when we are in the same industry and see the same things happening. That's why we built...

Hang on, I know you are busy and want to get straight to it but first, let's dig deeper. Tell me about your career journey so far. I want to hear how you laid the foundation for your solution.

Jarrold: Yep, did the surveying degree at Otago, it's the only place that has one you know, and spent 10 years in Sydney. Eventually I became General Manager and started an office in New South Wales and grew from just myself to 45 staff in 18 months.

Then in 2017 I came back to New Zealand and took on a General Manager role at Survey Worx. At that time Survey Worx had about 15 staff, all based in Auckland. I sort of applied the company acceleration formula I learned back in Australia and now lead a much larger exceptional team around the country.

Peter: Not as an impressive I should say but a bit different, yeah, I worked in Aussie for 6 years – as a surveyor. After graduating at Otago like Jarrold – in fact so long ago but me and Jarrold worked at the same company in Aussie. Anyway, I head off to London, spent 5 years there. And Hong Kong for three before coming back to New Zealand at the end of 2022.

In London I worked as a project manager – the London Bridge upgrade was one of mine. In Hong Kong, it was during Covid and an uprising and a real 'interesting time'. I was doing an MBA at Hong Kong University and with a couple of friends started up an air-refreshener business start-up. 'Airguard' was its name, we had a patented raw natural cleaning / sanitiser product for insertion into building heating and ventilation systems. With Covid all around us, we were easily able to raise quite a lot of funding and grew very quickly. We went from one to 18 staff in 12 months.

And then we left Hong Kong and came back to New Zealand. Once again, I was employee number one. Two and a bit years later, we have 15 staff, and just about to open a second office in Hamilton.

You both have proven how to start or pickup from others and grow businesses very fast. That is very impressive – what do you put that down to? Is it systems? Processes? Mindset?

Jarrold: Yeah, systems and processes are important, as much as it is with building a culture that staff want to stay and clients want to work with you. I had studied a MBA from Macquarie University in Sydney and there I learnt fast how to know your customer and give them what they want.

Is it worth doing an MBA then, still with everything online at your fingertips nowadays?

Peter: I think so, definitely put me in a great position to figure and to sort out Survey Group.

Jarrold: Yes, and things just move faster overseas compared to New Zealand. In Australia you get used to things moving at a drop of a hat. I mean in surveying they use the same technology and business practices; it's just they have a more mature industry over there. Things need to happen fast otherwise you don't get ahead. All about communication and service levels.

Peter: Hong Kong moved fast. It is just so dominated by the financial industry, so I guess that rubs off on you.

Ok, so you applied big fast moving foreign city country principles to small ole NZ. Both with a strong desire – that’s a mindset thing- to grow and obviously the ability to scale businesses. Technology in Surveying though – where is that at? From a property development perspective, it feels like surveying has been through quite a lot of technological change, maybe more than any other consultant in the industry. Like drones, didn’t you guys have to spend days walking over mountains – stockpiles- of dirt measuring volume? And now you have those scanners that can measure buildings?

Jarrod: Yeah, what started out as a big productivity gain, the with drones for at least our surveying business it has taken jobs away from surveyors because contractors can do that themselves. And really your mobile phone can automatically scan and dimension spaces now. What I see as the most importantly technological change was GPS and more recently, laser scanning. That made a huge difference to how we do business.

Peter: The current surveying tech can scan 2 million points per second! And robots. Robotic technology in the surveying instruments & equipment. Before you might have to have two people on a site, now it’s one. And they are only on site for the same time as they used to. So that is a 50% decrease in onsite staff costs.

All those gains which have conveniently sidestepped much of the rest of the construction industry -it just seems everything keeps getting more expensive! Although maybe technology has slowed the pace of increase, so

has Surveying pricing become any cheaper over the years?

Jarrod: Yeah, it definitely has. We are time driven, where tech is the driver that keeps ~~on~~ moving the price point lower.

Peter: Those topo surveys used to take 2 days now you can fly drone it in 2 hours. That’s technology increasing productivity dramatically and that’s what we wanted to create here with....

Guys, I can see how antsy you have become. You might be sick of your respective stories, but I like to set the scene for the readers. You want me to promote your software and start talking about features and all that but I’m sure there are others who will benefit -maybe even get inspired- from your entrepreneurial journeys. Let’s hear the reasons why first. Then you can talk to us about the how and the what!

So why did you have this bright idea for a piece of software you have recently launched? Before we even mention its name (apart from the title of this interview of course!) what was the trigger? What was the issue you were trying to fix?

Jarrod: I think it came as a function of growth pains. Being the Director, eventually if a client had an issue with us, they would contact me. There was a recurring theme, many clients were frustrated that they didn’t know what was happening with their projects.

Who are your clients?

Jarrold: Yeah, this is mainly about the mums and dads type clients, the business to consumer (B2C) clients. Typically, the ones getting a new house built. The business to business (B2B) clients, developers and large property owners are much more prone to following up with our team where everything is at themselves. And because our surveyors are working with them on different projects, or very large projects daily, the “where is that task at” conversation is just a routine part of the comms, of the back and forth.

But for smaller clients, a lot of Survey Worx bread and butter, many wanted feedback and progress updates and frankly my team was not delivering on that.

Believe me we tried. Every monthly meeting, it became a bold point on the minutes -update your clients! And so, everyone did, for a few days and then they fell back into their old habits. And then I would get the phone call.

It's just human nature – a surveyor's core role is to survey, to get a job and complete it. All the follow-up was a burden to their other work. And it's time that we were not getting compensated for. So, the client is not getting great service, and we are not getting compensated anymore when we try to do so.

Then another penny dropped. In the open plan office, all around me I used to hear the same conversations. Every day, multiple times. I could overhear staff saying pretty much saying the same things to clients. We had curious clients, and they wanted not only to know where a surveying task was at – like when will the topo survey be complete - but the actual process, the steps along the way. Developers we work with already know most of that and they have been there and done it before. But the smaller one-off clients, they didn't understand, they

wanted to know that everything was on track in the background. And I heard my staff repeatedly telling them the same process, over and over again. That was not productive!

Peter: We had exactly the same issues. We had the same problem. And it was going to be a growth bottleneck if we didn't address it. Hard to grow in the difficult market that we have had, but once things are back on track, we didn't want this 'problem' to impede us.

It's a bit fuzzy, but let's say its late 2023 and whilst having a few beers our mutual frustration with this problem grew into a robust conversation. We threw ideas at each other. That night of course we solved it. Then the next day we woke up and had to work to solve it all over again!

Ok, Houston we have a problem. Now we need a solution. On that fateful night of realisation and commitment did you decide you were going to build some sort of AI powered widget or how did you really start?

Jarrold: No, we had no real idea, so we said let's pull this apart and research. First let's talk to clients, so we talked to homeowners. We talked to other companies. We went looking for the sources of the pain points and basically did a whole heap of research.

Peter: We went back to existing and past clients and asked for feedback. Mostly they wanted more communication. Of course, we already knew that so then we had to work on improving communication and hopefully automating it.

But surely you looked at your competitors and others in your industry – how did they overcome this problem?

Jarrold: They either don't update their clients, or if they do at all they are relying on manual processes and the diligence of their staff.

What was your experience with Artificial Intelligence before you set out to solve your business problem?

Peter: Very limited, honest with you.

Jarrold: I had done a bit of using and trialling AI. With surveying you need to keep up to date with the latest technology, just to stay competitive so I am always looking at integrating whatever we can into our company. Those who nail it prosper first is my way if thinking.

So, you jumped on the bandwagon and decided to use AI. ChatGPT had only been around about a year by that time. And everyone was solving their problems with AI by this stage, right?

Peter: Well not us. We were thinking quite traditional, at least in a tech sense. Maybe it could be a structured email template. We even thought about hiring a person to correspond progress on behalf of staff. But that was only going to cost us more opex and then still had the human error part. Not sustainable.

Jarrold: the conversation started with a template, every project was templated, so we had workflows built for that. and we only added AI later on.

Peter: AI only came about as part of the solution for a specific component of the software, and once again that came from feedback through our testing process with other companies and clients. We wanted to create a very simple business communication tool. In the end it just happens to use AI to help compile messages and that is all.

Jarrold: So far that is...

Let's put you out of your misery. What is the name of your solution?

Jarrold and Peter: Zipp.

Jarrold: We have the getZipp.com domain name for the American market. Firstly, we couldn't get the Zipp.com domain and we thought, well you only have to get the Zipp app once so getzipp.com was it.

And how did you arrive at the name?

Jarrold: Well, I originally had called it BeeStork.

Sorry?

Peter: Yeah, I hated it too!

Jarrold: Hey, my kids and I loved it at the time! You know bees with their great sense of communication amongst each other. And well the Stork delivers. So as a tagline 'Communication that delivers'.

OK...I get ya. BeeStork.com

Peter: Yeah, do you want to buy that domain name?

Jarrold: Anyway, we decided on Zipp. Like a zipper, the two parts coming together. Bringing clients

together with their projects, 'zipping' as in 'communicating'.

Peter: you know that is the first time I have understood that!

To summarise, Zipp is an online application that uses a little Artificial Intelligence to solve the problem of surveying companies communicating with their clients. Is that right?

Actually, you tell me. Give me your 10 second elevator pitch?

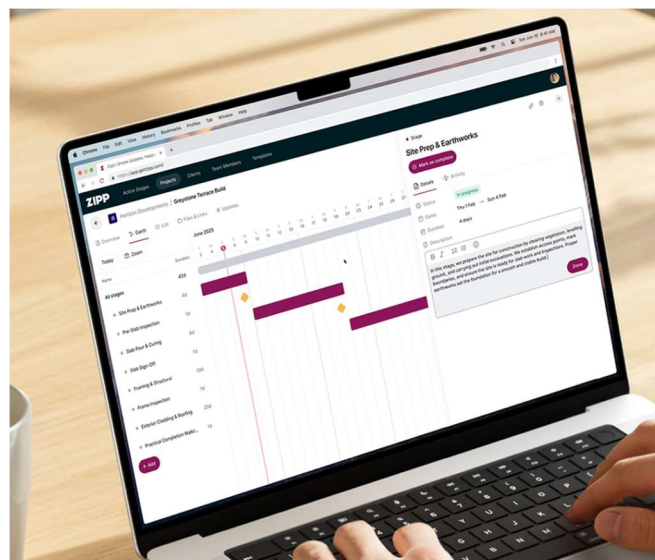
Jarrod: We help businesses update their clients. We have enabled anyone to view the progress and process of their projects in real time.

Peter: Zipp is a business communication tool that gives the end user full transparency on internal workflow. It allows any business to be more productive and to communicate and update clients on project workflows.

Not bad pitches, however I would prefer to see how much dollars you propose to save companies in those ten seconds!

Peter: And not just surveying, I see this tool as providing real value to all sorts of industries, basically any consulting firm or subcontractor that does projects for consumers. Tradies, engineers, of course surveyors and architects.

Jarrod: And even as it has evolved, with an endless list of features clients would like us to add, the core principles remain the same. To update multiple clients across multiple projects at multiple stages and multiple types of projects and do it fast.

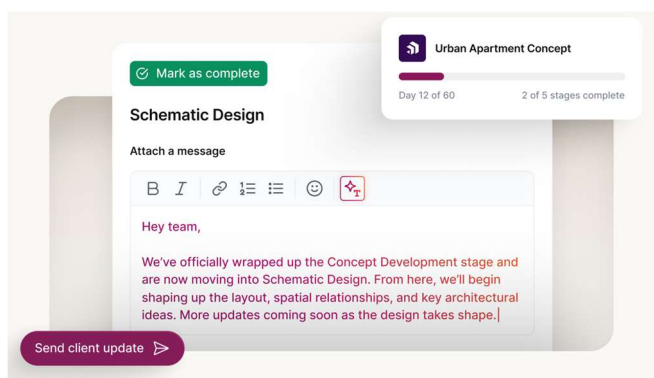


You got the problem, you have researched your options and somewhere along the build process you settle on Zipp. How was it building the Zipp application?

Jarrod: This is my second time building software. The first time in 2018 I built 'HomeProfile'. It was a platform amassing all sorts of IP about a property to accompany the sale of a property, including 3D models. The biggest lesson with that flash in the pan was that you need a strong team.

So, I had worked with software developers before and knew we needed someone that could take us all the way. We wanted them to have a proven track record. That's how we chose Edition Studios. They had recently built an application called 'Kernel', it had won some awards. I knew one of the owners and I pitched him the idea, at least the problem we were trying to solve. They understood the challenge, provided an immense amount of feedback and we were into it.

Peter: After 3 months research, six months building a prototype we then spent nine months in beta working with clients and other companies to refine. It was closed beta testing, just with some trusted partners. We had Survey Worx a larger company, Survey Group a medium sized one, a few builders, an electrician, a painter trade and an accountant. They all helped us during beta working with their clients and gathering real time feedback on Zipp.



And what about staff?

Jarrold: We have now decided to do our product development in-house along with business development. We have hired a real achiever in this space to be the person to take us to the next level. We found Stevie Mayhew, who as Chief Technology Officer, had successfully exited other applications. Around him we will build an internal development team to add more features to the product and continually improve.

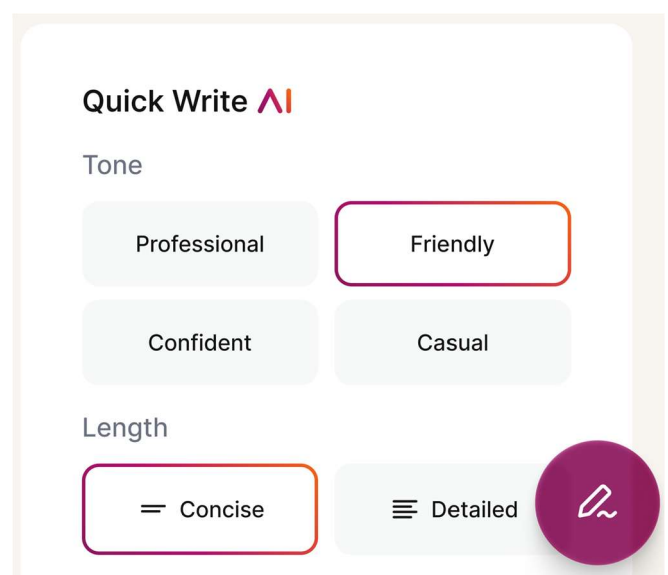
Peter: I knew Steve for ten years. We would catch up when he came back and forth from the States.

We mentioned features briefly. Are these features ones that your clients want – or are they what you want?

Peter: Keep it simple!

Jarrold: There are about 400 features I want, but yeah, the core is to keep it simple for companies to use. That's so they get all the benefits of keeping their clients informed without a massive investment in time on how to use Zipp.

The template feature is key to keep it simple. Essentially the process, or each step of a particular service is identified and written down for industry or project. You only have to write that process down once and it is stored as a template. Or you simply choose one of our standard templates. We have about 30 now across a number of industries, from architects to lawyers, surveying -obviously- to house building.



When you tick the step off, a prompt to notify the client is automatically generated. Then this is where we had started down the track of providing message templates, but our software developer said we can use AI to automate the message. Client feedback was great, that saved anyone having to create

message templates. Our AI automatically writes the email to the client in different message styles the writer can choose. This provides standardisation across the business, so all communications have the same flavour and allows some customisation if the user wishes to. And at the end, the user can choose to add a templated message to highlight tips and tricks or to upsell their services in the final correspondence. We put that in, because most of our beta testers were doing that manually to their clients. End of a project, add a perhaps you need to buy this, type message.

Ok, I think we'll leave the how it works part for readers to figure out on their own. I have had a good go at it, and it's very simple. And that's where its powerful – in its simplicity. Easy to use, easy to update clients on job progress, easy to set up the projects in the first place. I see applications in my business as I am running all sorts of projects. And I see a tonne of applications for consultants to advise their clients. Planners, everyone involved in the RC process, architects and the like.

However, and this is important, what are the benefits that your clients and your beta testers clients have demonstrated?

Peter: Well one of the big things is the transparency. Clients can now see where their project is at and when a milestone is hit, they receive the auto AI generated update. That gives them piece of mind and more importantly saves everyone a phone conversation or an email back and forth on where the project is at. That is a huge time saving, money saving, productivity enhancement for us. Two birds –

better client service & satisfaction and internally we are much more consistent and less time wasting.

Jarrod: Another angle is for those customers tendering projects. They put a brief blurb about using Zipp in their proposals to their clients, for example how the client will receive AI powered automated progress and behind the scenes transparency. That value-add helps them win projects!

You launched Zipp on August 25, 2025, what's next and where next?

Jarrod: Well, we are constantly refining our offering based on feedback.

Peter: But besides that, we have the final product right now – its live and its making users more productive and providing a better level of service to their customers.

What is the future? What does success look like in 12 months' time (which is an eternity in the world of AI)?

Jarrod: We have penetrated the global market.

Peter: Ok, maybe not that far... Success looks like we are trading, on the ground, within the United States within 12 months.

Jarrod: 1,000 users in NZ.

Peter: I would like us to hit it 300 users in New Zealand –that would mean 250 different companies and from 10 to 15 different industries. Currently we have Architects, builders, surveyors, planners, accountants and lawyers.

Jarrod: And engineers, last week we onboarded a structural engineering consultancy, and that was a great fit for Zipp.

And how did you come up with the price – how much is it again?

Jarrod: Well from our testing, our clients saw that for the value it provides it should be a high price point – that was the feedback.

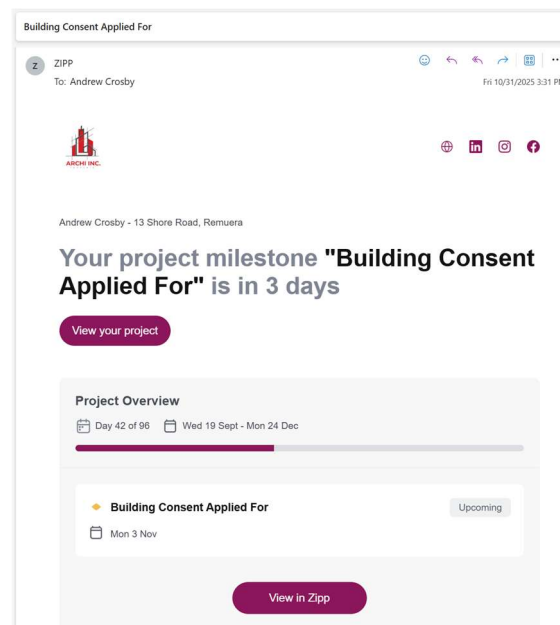
Peter: This is one of our biggest disagreements! So, we did a survey and decided to provide a low price point, to minimise the barriers to entry in the New Zealand market. It's \$24.95 per month per user. Anything higher for such a simple tool, is taking the ...well you know.

Does every user have to pay?

Jarrod: No, there is a free tier for small companies. However, a user is essentially a manager overseeing multiple projects -they can have one user on unlimited projects within that small monthly fee. For example, at Survey Worx with 100 staff, we have only five users. Most small companies only need one.

You want to grow your user base right? What is the final message, the final call to action you want me to send out there?

Jarrod: Communication technologies are improving rapidly. AI cannot do what we do alone, so Zipp is here to help improve organisation's relationships with their clients. This software can be the simple improvement to drastically improve your client satisfaction and retention. Get in early to make use of the competitive advantage it provides!



Peter: Zipp gives your clients what they want; transparency and detailed information at their fingertips. Use it once and you'll see that the value it provides clients is not even comparable to the low cost of the software.

And that's the pitch people! Go and try Zipp yourself at GetZipp.com. Thank you to Jarrod and Peter for your time today.

Zipp recently won 1st place in the Best Awards digital category for software and design the biggest and most prestigious award of its type in NZ.