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YSP Podcast Transcript: Episode 075. The Rise of the Urbanise Platform – with James Mahony

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Intro: Welcome to Your Strata Property. The podcast for property owners looking for reliable, accurate, and bite-sized information from an experienced and authoritative source. To access previous episodes and useful strata tips, go to www.yourstrataproperty.com.au.

Amanda Farmer: Hello and welcome! I'm Amanda Farmer and this is Your Strata Property. James Mahony is the head of Strata sales at Urbanise. James began his career in property in 2001 beginning as a property manager in Sydney and 2 years after that he moved into the strata management sector. In his 15 years of property experience, James has managed some of the world's most complex buildings with detailed government statements managing the common assets and financial structures. In 2009 James was invited to move to Dubai to work with a strata management company to grow its portfolio and develop its team. Following Dubai, James established a company in Belgium to advance the strata industry, which saw a very rapid growth in its portfolio. In 2014 James decided to move back to the country where it all began and worked with My Strata to further progress the company's footprint in Australia, New Zealand, and other areas in the Asia Pacific. In June 2015, My Strata was purchased by Urbanise and the rest is history! Today I am delighted to welcome James Mahony from Urbanise. Welcome, James!

James Mahony: Thanks for having me, Amanda!

Amanda Farmer: So lovely to have you here James. And we were just chatting offline, you're a local in Belgium and I'm heading over there in a few weeks, and thanks for the tips on the beer bars.

James Mahony: No dramas, there's plenty around.

Amanda Farmer: I'm looking forward to it. Now, I'm sure a lot of our listeners have heard about Urbanise, they might know a bit about what it is, what it does. They might know nothing at all. Why don't we start with an explanation of what the Urbanise platform is?

James Mahony: Yes, look. The Urbanise platforms actually ... it's made up of so many different pillars. But, in short, Urbanise is a cloud based platform. Which is used by companies that manage, service, or live in the property industry sector? It's used by the facilities management company: strata managers, tradespeople, property owners, and occupiers. The Urbanise platform is one the most intelligent and efficient strata management and facilities management software solutions. Given in any industry where time is of the essence, we try to make it as streamlined as possible with all the processes. And seeing that the tools for the trade in this industry is actually the systems that you use. So we try to make it as the best user-friendly, transparent, and automated management tool for our users. And we also extend our reach to the suppliers and the owners who can make use of the building portal. It comes with a mobile app, an app for the suppliers to work in their work fields. It actually manages their work flow as well. And we've got an e-marketplace where the strata managers can sell services into the building.

And finally, we've also got a remote asset monitoring system. So you can actually manage your critical assets off site without having to be on-site and taking those costly hours.

Amanda Farmer: Wow! Sounds like a major piece of software there. If you were a lot owner, and a lot of our listeners are ... how would you be interacting with this platform on a day to day basis? What kinds of things are you accessing and getting benefit from?
James Mahony: Yes the lot owners have a benefit of actually accessing the My Community portal. And My Community portal is a direct link to our My Strata platform, which allows live information. So it's real time information getting fed through to the owners. So that includes information like their financials, any building documents that their strata manager has published ... The strata manager can actually give access to the strata committee. So they can actually upload documents as well. So it becomes one of those areas where it's a hub for an information portal. More so than going straight to the manager, who sometimes is very hard to get a hold of. So it will actually reduce the amount of waiting time, and also increase the amount of transparency in the management of the building.



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Amanda Farmer: So they're contacting, or accessing, information that their strata manager holds through this platform. And I suppose also, building management ... as you said ... building and facilities managers are using this. And from the supplier perspective, if you are a trades person, what are you doing with the platform? How are you using it?

James Mahony: Well the trades people get advantage of the mobile apps. So what that means is when the strata manager is to release a job ... In the normal sense of the way things operate at present, the strata manager will release a job, then there's a gap between what's happening with that job until you receive an invoice. So basically what we've done is filled in that gap. And the way we've done so is when the job is sent through from our platform, the trades person can accept the job, which then notifies the occupier or the person who's reported the issue. And it'll also do a tracking of that particular job for that client. So anything written by the supplier will actually be supplied as information straight to that particular person that's reported the issue. Not only that, the supplier can then take photos on site before and after the event and attach an invoice. To be able to, basically, close off that particular event.

Amanda Farmer: Okay. Awesome. And remote monitoring of facilities? That's something that I have heard before and sounds kind of sci-fi. But the platform does that as well?

James Mahony: It is very sci-fi, it might come across that way. But look, it's actually very ... If you think about the way that current systems are working at the moment, there is companies out there that are hard wired managing all the assets of the building. Now, a building can be ... especially when you look at high rises, can be very sophisticated piece of material. Especially with all the assets that are involved. So we've developed a system basically that allows all different areas of those assets to be monitored remotely. And these are all by retrofitted sensor devices that communicate with a gateway, and then from that gateway, basically publishes the information. So you'll be able to see that information and set up thresholds. So if there was to be an event where something's not performing ... one of the assets aren't performing as they should be, you will get the notification.

So the notification can come to the manager or the building manager, or it can go straight to a contractor. So it can actually be attended to. That would be an example of the flood sensor that we have. So if something was to flood, it would basically send the information to the strata manager, and then it's copy on to the contractor. So if it happens at 2 o'clock in the morning, the job can be taken care of by 6 o'clock in the morning. By the time the strata manager is even thought about rolling out of bed I suppose.

Amanda Farmer: Sounds good. Now, Urbanise is nationwide, New Zealand, Asia Pacific? Where are you guys?

James Mahony: Yes we're in Australia, Singapore, New Zealand of course, South Africa, Dubai, London, and there's a few other operation areas. Obviously, we're still in Belgium where I established my company, which is operating off the My Strata platform. And it's also growing throughout Europe as well.

Amanda Farmer: Oh great. Fantastic to hear. Can you share a story of any particular building that's using the platform, and what are they liking about it? How is it helping them day to day?

James Mahony: Yes, well we have so many variances in the uses and operations within the building. So if they're using it to their full capacity, that's where they're going to get the benefit from that real time information I was talking about before. So that's provided to the occupants. So the use of My Community platform as an information hub definitely adds significantly reduces the volume of work for the strata manager. The benefit obviously of the remote monitoring systems does help out with a lot of buildings. especially the high rises. But given the fact that we have over 20,000 buildings on our platform across 10 different countries, it's difficult to pinpoint one in particular building that stands out. I know in our range we've got, you know, from small 2 story walk ups in Bondi all the way to the tallest tower in the world, which is Burj Khalifa in Dubai. There are using our remote sensor monitoring.

So you can imagine the amount of sensors throughout that structure, that hopefully is in existence. So there's a lot of success stories, but each of them are all using it for their own varied reasons. And each definitely is seeing the benefit of the platform.

Amanda Farmer: Now you've mentioned some reluctance. Where is this reluctance coming from? What are the problems that



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you're seeing buildings are facing when they're looking at using this kind of a platform? And how do we overcome that? How do we get past that reluctance and those problems?

James Mahony: I actually think that the reluctance is ... it's actually probably more from the strata manager trying to get it across the line at a ... any of these owners corporations' meeting, maybe. It's not so much the idea isn't there, the idea isn't great, but if we get any of the information to lot owners, and then they help drive it, it actually makes the decision a whole lot easier. But obviously getting their reach to the owners can be difficult sometimes. But once they know what it is, what can do and can prevent, buildings in those areas that are of high risk, especially in flood areas or even in high-risk debt areas, we've got monitors that can monitor all of that. As soon as they learn the benefit, there's actually no problem at all. But sometimes the manager will say, "Oh this is great. This is great. And I can't wait to implement." And then all of a sudden, they just don't take the next step. Because maybe time's got the best of them. So that'd be the only reluctance of way of saying ... Well I, personally, Yes.

Amanda Farmer: Do you think there may be some reluctance on the part of managers thinking, "Hang on, isn't all this my job? And if I delegate this out to a piece of software, I'm going to be left twiddling my thumbs?"

James Mahony: It's funny enough, because we have had that, and we also had that some time ago when we first developed the My Strata system. Especially with the accounts being so easy to process ... all the systems. So there was a lot of accountants and people working the accounts team within strata management companies that were worried about their positions. But what it is there for is actually the benefit to be able to spread the reach. So you can actually manage a larger portfolio. To make the company more profitable and given if you work for a root company, hopefully, they share that profit and profit nicely and everyone will benefit. But it's not there to eliminate jobs, it's there to create opportunities really.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, and the way I see it, if strata managers are relieved of the administrative burdens, which is really what these are, then they can be doing and should be doing that higher level, high touch stuff with their buildings, their committee members. Solving real problems that need intellect, need experience applied to them. And not be bogged down in invoices and service calls and things like that. I think that the platform can release them from that, and that can only be a good thing.

James Mahony: I think you're 100% correct on that. Look if you were to interview lot owners, I think their immediate response would be the lack of response from the next strata manager. To be able to service those buildings ... Obviously, it does require a bit of time and a lot of managers have got large portfolios where time is of the essence. This will only allow them that bit more time to spend there doing the quality work and doing the quality assurance across their portfolio, really.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. Absolutely. Okay, now, are you able to share with us, James ... and I'm probably putting you on the spot, but how much does this cost? Is this an expensive platform? You might say how long is a piece of string? Is there some indication we can give our listeners of what costs they'd be facing if they wanted to implement Urbanise?

James Mahony: Yes, look there's all ... like I said there's many different pillars that make up our system itself. So we have got the My Strata and My Community platforms. So that's there for more so the strata managers themselves which provide the information to the owners. And then that basically ... because we're all cloud based and it's easy access, we don't have any limited user access. So we might throw out as many operators to be actually available on the system. So that, you'd be looking at about a \$3000 dollar start for a strata company.

Amanda Farmer: Okay.

James Mahony: As far as the sense of monitoring and some of the work flow devices, that's all done on a case by case basis. So basically, it depends on the building and depends on the quantity of sensors. But you could be looking at an amount of about \$30-50 dollars a month to monitor some of the areas of your critical assets and flood monitoring, etc. The more devices that are deployed on one of the buildings means that the lesser the amount obviously, because the volume base. So we are doing a lot of structures with companies ... especially with the strata companies that have got portfolios that they know are high risk and looking at releasing those to quite a number of their portfolios. So they're looking at doing it at a larger scale. Which reduces the cost

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again. It's a retrofitted affordable way of being able to monitor these if you actually compare it to what it is for man hours.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. Sounds like it. Alright, now we might have some listeners out there who are getting very excited by the idea of Urbanise. What should their next step be if they want to find out more, or get started using Urbanise?

James Mahony: Well all the information is available on our website, which is urbanise.com.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, and I'll just spell that for our listeners. It's U-R-B-A-N-I-S-E Urbanise.

James Mahony: That's correct! And there's areas there to get in contact with us. So as you'll see ... in our contact inquiry form, there's a number label so that you can get in contact with us. So just choose the one that's applicable for you. And then we'll be able to get in touch and get a proposal off to you. And as it's cloud-based, it's actually very simple for us to get people up and running.

Amanda Farmer: And you have no hesitation dealing directly with lot owners? You wouldn't be sending them back to go through their strata manager? You're happy for them to come straight to you?

James Mahony: We're happy to provide all the information, and we can even help them out with bringing that to the meeting or whatever is necessary. But obviously the strata manager will need to include some information, so we'll have to try and keep them in the loop somehow as well.

But generally, if it's got some backing from the lot owners, it shouldn't be a problem getting the manager on-site as well to help getting him across the line.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. Excellent. Okay, James, a question that every guest gets on this podcast ... What books have had the greatest impact on you and why?

James Mahony: My favourite and it's still one that I refer to many, many times over a year is Law of Attraction by Michael J. Losier. It's Lah-sier or Low-sier. Now I'm not too sure the pronunciation of his last name, but it's actually one of those books that once you start reading it, you don't put it down. It's only one of those small books, and it's basically the way to approach different situations and the mannerism in which you actually bring to the table is quite important. You don't ever see which you bring to the table is what you're going to receive from it which is that general term around law of attraction. I've done comparisons with this book and other ones that are law and attraction, and this is by far my favourite. So that's my standout.

Amanda Farmer: Awesome! Thank you for sharing that. And I'll make sure there's a link to that in the show notes for any of our listeners who want to check that out. How do our listeners find out more about you James? And anything you want to add before we wrap up?

James Mahony: Well, all of our information for Urbanise is online, at Urbanise.com. We don't have individual staff profiles, but of course, they can get in touch with me, just simply by emailing me at James full stop Mahony, M-A-H-O-N-Y, at Urbanise.com. (James.Mahony@urbanise.com) And basically from there we can actually get in touch and changing software is never easy, but it is one of those things that I hope people put enough time and effort into, because of the investment that it's going to save them in the future of actually reducing their time.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. I agree. Thank you so much for your time today, James.

James Mahony: My absolute pleasure.

Amanda Farmer: Catch you next time!



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James Mahony: Thank you! Bye!

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