

Publication Date: 20 September 2016
YSP Podcast Transcript: Episode 028. How Electronic Voting Will Drive Strata Owner Engagement - with Dee Pannell (references to NSW and QLD legislation)

Listen to this podcast episode [here](#).

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.

Dee Panell is the Managing Director of Strata Vote providing electronic voting and meeting management software specifically designed for the strata industry in Australia.

Strata owners can now vote anywhere anytime that they have an internet connection. Managers can utilise the advantages of this cloud-based software and manage online all paper votes, saving them time, money, and improving accuracy and compliance as Strata Vote calculates the results.

Today, I am delighted to welcome Dee Pannell from Strata Vote. Welcome, Dee.

Dee Panell: Thank you for inviting me to talk with you today about Strata Vote.

Amanda Farmer: Our absolute pleasure Dee, and I know that Strata Vote has been operating in Queensland for a little while, where our Queenslanders have had electronic voting as part of their legislation and they've been permitted to have that, it's something that we're just about to kick off here in New South Wales when we get our new Strata Schemes Management Act on the 30th of November 2016. So I want to start by asking you Dee, can you tell us a little bit about how this electronic voting system has been operating in Queensland and what you think might be on the cards for New South Wales?

Dee Panell: The Queensland legislation does allow for electronic voting. Managers had been using email and facsimile to send out notices prior to Strata Vote.

However, managers now – who have had the opportunity to use Strata Vote – are using it for their entire meeting process: they build their meeting, and they can send out either electronic notices or generate a hard copy notice to post to owners that do not want to use electronic voting.

We've been reviewing the changes for the New South Wales legislation and we believe it will provide a solution for those owners who cannot attend a meeting and don't want to appoint a proxy.

We've found that those managers that have been using Strata Vote are really excited, they're finding that they're getting a better response – a little bit slowly because owners are just catching on – but they're really enthusiastic and we've been getting some really positive feedback.

Amanda Farmer: Good to hear. How exactly does the Strata Vote software work?

Dee Panell: For owners it's a very simple process: owners advise their managers that they want to vote electronically, they will receive an email with a link to their meeting notice, their agenda, and their voting paper, they then select how they want to vote whether it be yes, no, abstain, etcetera – within each motion there is also a link to the information that relates to that motion, so a little PDF that they can either copy to their computer or open up and read and it makes it very easy for them – they then select submit, they enter their verification code, all votes are encrypted and the results are secure – they cannot be tampered with -, and then the managers have instant access to the results of those votes. We can also handle secret ballot voting.

Amanda Farmer: Is it something that the entire building needs to be a part of?



Publication Date: 20 September 2016
YSP Podcast Transcript: Episode 028. How Electronic Voting Will Drive Strata Owner Engagement - with Dee Pannell (references to NSW and QLD legislation)

Dee Pannell: Yes.

Amanda Farmer: I know with the New South Wales changes to the legislation... I believe if an owners corporation wants to vote electronically they have to pass a motion approving that – that's the owners corporation general meeting or the strata committee meeting – so is that the same system in Queensland where they must all agree?

Dee Pannell: That's right. They've all got to agree and, under the Electronic Transactions legislation, not only does the scheme have to agree but the owners have to agree. So you'll have some owners that will choose to postal vote and some that will want to electronic vote, but the scheme overall has to approve it.

Amanda Farmer: Okay. Dee, can you share a story around how Strata Vote has helped or assisted a building, an owner or a manager with its software and the service that it can provide?

Dee Panell: Initially Strata Vote was built for the Queensland legislation. I received a phone call from a Victorian Strata Manager one day who desperately wanted to see if he could use Strata Vote. He said that they had sent out several postal votes and it was two critical motions that they were trying to get across the board. We made some very quick changes to Strata Vote and he sent out his electronic votes to all of the owners – there was in excess of 300 lots -, there was a unanimous resolution and a special resolution which again, Strata Vote calculates the results for you. Originally he couldn't even get a handful of people to vote and afterwards he got 50% across the board voting, so that just proved to him that it was quite possible to get a quorum and have people vote if they're given the opportunity to vote electronically.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, fantastic and in that way this kind of software is really making an important difference in the sector where it's giving people the opportunity who wouldn't otherwise have had the opportunity, or perhaps the inclination, to have a say in their community to have a really easily accessible way of having that say and hopefully that's what we'll see, is more people being involved in the decision making process because it is simply easier.

Dee Panell: That's right, and look, to be honest with you, not everybody can go to a meeting at 3'o clock on a Friday afternoon.

Amanda Farmer: Yes.

Dee Panell: There are other people that are in a wheelchair for instance, they can't go to the meeting so now all they have got to do is have a computer, an iPad or even their iPhone, and they can vote easily and they don't have anybody looking over their shoulder putting any pressure on them when they decide to make their vote selections.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, a really important point, and they can take their time to look through the material. As you say, there's that facility for the material to be attached with the electronic meeting notice so you can be sitting in front of your computer, going through the PDF, reading in your own time and at your own pace the financials and any contracts that are being approved, rather than having this bundle of paper that you don't look at until you're sitting there in the meeting, and then having either a series of questions for the poor chairperson who has to answer them on the spot, or not being able to ask the question because you haven't had the chance to consider it.

Dee Panell: Exactly, and in the way that Strata Vote works, those owners can still go to the meeting, we're not discouraging them, they can make their vote selection, it then provides them with a PDF copy of their vote selection and all of those documents so they could head off to the meeting with their iPhone or their iPad and they can refer to that through the meeting and they're completely up-to-date with what's going on.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, that's really a good point. Dee, what are the most common challenges that you've noticed buildings, managers or committee members are facing when it comes to adopting electronic voting and what's working best in terms of overcoming them?

Publication Date: 20 September 2016
YSP Podcast Transcript: Episode 028. How Electronic Voting Will Drive Strata Owner Engagement - with Dee Pannell (references to NSW and QLD legislation)

Dee Pannell: Look, I suppose, I look at Strata Vote at the moment as like the Uber of the strata industry.

Amanda Farmer: I love that, I hope so!

Dee Pannell: Yes, that's right. Look, it's like anything new: you've got to change your processes. Managers are generally time poor, so the managers that we speak to and have a look at Strata Vote, they love it. They say "this is wonderful, but oh my gosh how are we going to get time to implement it?" because there's a series of things that have to happen, and it's just like with anything in life. When one of my bosses said to me "we're throwing away your typewriters on Friday, and we're all going to start using computers" we nearly had a mass walk-out, so it's the same with everything. There is a little bit of time to implement this and plus the legislation doesn't make it easy because there are processes that have to be gone through. I think in an ideal world, the legislative process should say that electronic voting should be the default, that's the way I feel and if anybody wants it in paper well they've just got to put their hand up.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. Fair enough, well it is the modern world and I suppose what you probably see, as we do down here, is that there are some managers and management companies who are well equipped and able to adapt to this kind of change, they're quite agile with their business models and they're quite up to date with their technology, and they're the kinds of managers that we see taking up these kinds of programs, and then there's the other managers who have maybe been around for many, many years running the office out of cardboard boxes, they're the ones who might still be on the typewriters and they're the ones who probably are going to have trouble taking up this kind of service.

And that's a matter I think that comes down to the buildings themselves to be the judge of: maybe they're happy with that kind of management, maybe they want someone who's more modern, more up-to-speed on this stuff, and they're going to vote with their feet really, aren't they? If they want someone who is willing to take up this kind of software so that they can vote electronically, they're going to find the manager who can hold their hand while they do that.

Dee Pannell: That's right. Look, what we're finding is because in a lot of these huge buildings – for instance on the Gold Coast – there's a huge contingency of Chinese owners. Now, they're receiving their voting papers maybe 15 days after they're sent out. Now, I think in New South Wales there's 7 days?

Amanda Farmer: 7 clear days, yes.

Dee Pannell: That's right. 7 days now with the current postal system, it might not even reach the owner.

Amanda Farmer: Yes.

Dee Pannell: So I think that's why we've got to embrace electronic voting, because the postal system is getting harder, it's becoming more expensive, and a lot of owners are disfranchised. In Queensland, even in sending their paper votes back, they're arriving after the meeting.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, and that's just not good enough, is it? When you're talking about people's homes and their investments, there are some serious decisions being made and they need to be part of it.

Dee Pannell: That's right.

Amanda Farmer: Okay. So Dee, I'm sure we've got some listeners who are very interested in this concept of electronic voting, particularly here in New South Wales where we're finally going to be in a position where we can take part in it. What do you suggest those listeners do? What are some quick steps or some quick wins that they can get on the board here to get more involved in electronic voting or getting it going in their building?

Dee Pannell: I think it's important that they speak to their strata managers because the strata managers have to use this program.

Publication Date: 20 September 2016
YSP Podcast Transcript: Episode 028. How Electronic Voting Will Drive Strata Owner Engagement - with Dee Pannell (references to NSW and QLD legislation)

So strata managers have to be onboard but they've also got to know that the owners are encouraging it, that they want to use it.

For owners that don't know where to go, they can go to our website, they can contact us, we can give them a little bit of information, steer them in the right direction, and make the process a little bit easier for them.

Amanda Farmer: Excellent. Now Dee, a personal question: what books have had the greatest impact on you and why?

Dee Panell: I think one of them was the Seth Godin book The Purple Cow.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, I love Seth Godin. Yes.

Dee Panell: I love it. It was 'transform your business by being remarkable'.

Amanda Farmer: Yes.

Dee Panell: We've tried to do that with Strata Vote because we want to stand out in that paddock of cows, and it's very important for us to provide a really good service with an excellent product.

Amanda Farmer: Well, you're certainly in the right place at the right time Dee, and Strata Vote has much ahead of it I'm sure. You're probably trying to catch your breath with keeping up with all of these changes?

Dee Panell: I think so. We're getting a lot of enquiries out of New South Wales which is really exciting for us.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, fabulous. Okay, so Dee, how do listeners find out more about you and Strata Vote and is there anything you want to add before we say goodbye?

Dee Panell: No, just go to our website: www.stratavote.com.au or you can call us on 1300 938 683.

Amanda Farmer: Fabulous.

Dee Panell: Thank you.

Amanda Farmer: Thanks for giving us your time today Dee, and all the best in building the next evolution of Strata Vote.

Dee Panell: Thank you Amanda, it's been a pleasure. Bye.

Amanda Farmer: Bye.

Outro: Thank you for listening to Your Strata Property. The podcast which consistently delivers to property owners reliable and accurate information about their strata property. You can access all the information below this episode by the show notes at www.yourstrataproperty.com.au. You can also ask questions in the comment section which Amanda will answer in her upcoming episodes. How can Amanda help you today?