

Showing nerves of steel

SAITEX EXPO

ANNI BODINGTON, despite having to overcome many personal challenges has succeeded in building a multi-million rand export business.

According to Bodington, she had "several less-than-successful attempts at various jobs and made some bad decisions".

But after six years at a multi-national, where she achieved a measure of success, she joined her husband Trevor in his business and in 1999 became 100% shareholder of Taita Engineering SA. The company, which manufactures components for the wine and transport industries, is now in its 10th year with major contracts in the rail transportation sector.

Taita Engineering's creative technical team, Trevor Bodington and Brian Wallace, designed, amongst others, machinery for the production of palisade fencing.

Bodington, as MD and majority shareholder, co-founded TESA Palisade Fencing and Security Systems in 2001 with finance partners.

Making steel security fences and gates for the local construction market, she lacked experience and capital and found the male-dominated industry daunting. When the owner of a competing company predicted at a meeting that TESA would not survive six months due to the tough nature of the industry, she became determined to succeed.

"We were a small fish in a big pond and had to fight from the very beginning. About 95% of the time we did not win tenders, the company

selling us the steel pulled out of SA, and a senior manager with knowledge of our intellectual property joined an opposition company. We struggled to find our niche."

The company realised they were far more efficient and cost-effective with bulk production and started exporting in 2003.

"The local market was inconsistent and the stop/start trend in the construction industry did not suit our production setup," says Bodington. "But our big breakthrough happened in 2007, when we identified a gap in the African communications infrastructure sector for kit-form security fencing."

TESA now exports to Madagascar, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana and 14 other African countries.

"Africa is one of the last remaining emerging markets and opportunity is plentiful," says Bodington.

Starting as a small family business and evolving first to a small and then a medium-sized enterprise has come with its own headaches as the entire culture has had to change while keeping the essence of the original business.

As the company has grown, TESA has employed a logistics and shipping specialist and developed a strong relationship with finance partner CT International.

"Lastly, remaining competitive with steel price volatility is walking a very fine line, but TESA balances this out with taking service the extra mile," she says.



Anni Bodington

TESA has attended trade shows, more recently in Washington at an Infrastructure in Africa convention, as a percentage of the marketing is aimed at American companies in Africa. The company first used massive billboards but this exposure is geared more to the domestic market. TESA has always used good quality hard copy marketing and sponsorship of events, more recently in sport.

"But the most effective way we have found to get our product

known, is by identifying the correct key players within the companies of the sector we have targeted, and to have a constant, high profile presence with these people.

"Our business development team, headed by Craig Paine, maintains these relationships and as the head offices of the sector are based mainly in Johannesburg, we make regular visits to put TESA out there and keep us there."

Paine visited Senegal, Kenya, Nigeria, Botswana, Ghana and Rwanda in March alone to maintain their profile in these countries.

Her tips for would-be exporters include identifying any possible quality issues before you export. "Get your house in order. Code of Conduct audits become the order of the day. Your quality may be good, but this might not be enough to get you through the door."

"Fair labour practice, enterprise development and higher than expected attention to staff welfare have always been policies TESA has upheld."

"Quality and attention to detail is paramount when the goods are being transported out of the country. If, for example, a small item is omitted during packing, the cost impact is huge in terms of additional, short-notice shipping. The impact on your relationship with your customer is the biggest cost as they might have a deadline to meet. This could blow you out of the water for future business

-Business Day

IT MAY be a happy coincidence or it may simply reflect the current realities of SA's positioning in world trade. Whatever the reason, this year's Southern African International Trade Exhibition Expo (SAITEX) falls neatly in line with the aspirations of incoming Minister of Trade and Industry, Rob Davies.

According to a recent report in Business Day, one area that Davies intends focusing on is South-South trade. Here SAITEX "walks the talk" with dozens of international exhibitors from South America, Argentina, Brazil and Ecuador, as well as even more from China, Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

And there is no "shabby" representation from Africa either with companies from Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe all taking up space at the expo.

In order to facilitate trade between this diversity of business interests, the organisers of SAITEX - Exhibition Management Services - offer a free business match-making service. All exhibitors and pre-registered visitors are invited to submit - at no charge - their details and requirements. These are then assessed and profiled by a sophisticated computer system to ensure that companies and individuals with common interests are effectively matched at the expo.

Expo happens from 19 to 21 July.

Implementation of marketing plan grows business

Introduction

MQ Thatchers and Projects was started by Armstrong Ngquzana and brothers Innocent and Patrick Khanyilke in 2006. They have extensive experience in thatch making and woodwork and specialise in thatch umbrellas and indoor and outdoor wooden furniture. This is a 100% BEE initiative. MQ Thatchers and Projects is based at Furntech in Paarden Island as these premises offer a professional environment for budding entrepreneurs and specialised equipment which they could not otherwise afford.



Manufacture of outdoor wooden benches

Challenge

MQ Thatchers and Projects have focused on tenders in the Western Cape to grow their business. They intend targeting South African National Parks, petrol stations and holiday resorts. As a new business they do not have the cash flow to produce the marketing material to attract new clients.

Solution

Seda's service provider, Native Design Studio, was contracted to assist MQ Thatchers and Projects in developing marketing material for their business. First they designed a logo for the company which would start building a corporate identity for the new business. This logo design was incorporated in all the marketing material produced by Native Design Studio. This included business

cards, letterheads, brochures and folders. The folders can be used for presenting proposals, quotes, illustrations and photographs. A company profile was also developed and printed as a separate brochure.

Result

"The marketing material has helped us a lot," said Innocent Khanyilke who is in charge of marketing the company. "It has given us the confidence to approach new clients as we now have professional looking marketing material."

From the desk of Innocent Khanyilke:

"Thanks to the brochures we were contracted to make 12 outdoor benches for False Bay College. We have produced and installed steel benches along the West Coast and at the V & A Waterfront and were contracted to refurbish and install thatch umbrellas for the Airports Company at Cape Town International airport. We have also employed two casual staff members and can finally take a salary out of the business. The separate company profile leaves a good impression with new clients and as a result our customer base has increased threefold. All of this has contributed to increased sales of 92%. We are very happy with the project and the help we got from seda."



The final product ready for delivery