

Buckman Africa celebrates 40 years



In celebration of Buckman Africa's 40th anniversary this year, the Editor speaks to Leigh Mann, General Manager of Buckman Africa and Buckman Asia, on how the company views its past, present and future within the pulp and paper industry.

Buckman celebrates 40 years of successful business in Africa this year. What has been the key to this success?

As a company we have strong core values that we have sustained throughout the years. Buckman has built a successful business model over the past 65 years using strong fundamentals that incorporate, total commitment to our customers, shown by adding true and recognised value to their businesses through long term relationships built on trust and a total product offer that includes knowledge, service commitment, technology and above all people; our people are our biggest asset. Also, important for Buckman Africa has been the development of sophisticated operations capabilities here in South Africa over the past 40 years. We see this as key to providing a competitive edge and being a reliable and sustainable supplier to industry in Africa.

What would you pinpoint as the most prominent changes for Buckman Africa across its 40 year history?

The diversity of our products is the biggest change. We have grown tremendously from only supplying a few products as a small company in the 1970s to supplying a full product range today. On the ground, the biggest change has been the creation of a strong and stable manufacturing and knowledge base. These changes

have been made possible by the strong international lines of communication that we have, embodied by Buckman International's matrix management systems which integrate global and local leadership and access to resources.

As part of an international company, how do you balance local market requirements with global strategies?

Although Buckman Africa is 100% locally staffed and is geared for local markets, the industries that we serve are directly impacted by global trends and pressures. At Buckman we have developed strong communications networks throughout the company that have a common understanding of the need to balance local requirements with our global plans.

How important has the pulp and paper industry been to Buckman?

Our company was founded on the supply of chemical products to this industry back in 1945. Our first products were sold to customers in South Africa in the sixties. Today, sales of chemicals into pulp and paper processes make up half our global sales. We are totally committed to this market and invest heavily in technology, operations and technical sales operations to support these efforts. I





Employees stand with an early company tanker (left) outside the original Jacobs premises in 1976 - 35 years on, Buckman Africa employees are armed with the same dedication *and* better technology, such as the company's new water treatment plant (above).

don't need to remind anyone of the tough nature of this industry, particularly in 2011. The success of our pulp and paper customers is the most essential part of our success.... our commitment is total.

You mention the tough nature of the pulp and paper industry. How has Buckman adapted to the knock-on effect of the recession in the mills, particularly with reduced production schedules and extended mill shuts?

The recession put much pressure on our company, globally and here in Africa, but I am pleased to report that we have adapted and survived. In this company we were early in implementing programmes that reduced our operating costs, brought high focus on the elimination of waste in our business and, ensured, in particular that we give the customer exactly what they want and are prepared to pay for, and nothing more. Our business depends on adding a

high level of service and knowledge to the basic chemical product and, in order to grow and be profitable, we have to ensure that we minimise the amount of business we do "at risk". This requires us to provide exactly what the customer wants and values (and is prepared to pay for). Remember, virtually all our revenue comes from selling the chemical product only, the rest is part of a value package we offer.

With the pulp and paper industry being relatively small, competition between suppliers is high. What are Buckman Africa's key competitive differentiators?

We have creative people, with strong leadership competencies who demonstrate ownership and accountability at all levels. We have the ability to supply a wide range of world class products, manufactured in South Africa to the pulp and paper industry. We are a global company, operating in 90 countries and we strive to be able to serve our key customers by supplying global technologies through strong local capabilities. Our business here in South Africa is able to supply the same state of the art technologies, products and services that our companies in any part of the developed world can ... without delay, everyday. We also see innovation as key to sustainable growth, specifically we have to ensure that this innovation is geared towards providing solutions that improve our customers' processes and provide measurable improvements in their business. We actively collaborate with our customers every day in developing innovative solutions to problems in the industry.



FROM THEN 'TIL NOW:
The Buckman Laboratories premises in Jacobs, 1973 (far left), was followed by a more expansive plant in Hammarsdale. Early construction in 1978 (middle) on the plant has culminated in the current Buckman Africa plant (left).



What is the advantage of being a primary manufacturer of speciality chemicals in South Africa?

Most of the products we sell are manufactured in our Hammarsdale, KZN manufacturing facility. This modern, state of the art, sustainable plant enables us to manufacture a wide range of complex reaction products and blends that are ready for supply to our customers throughout Africa at short notice. These products can be made to order, taking advantage of local raw materials where possible and this gives us a competitive supply chain and price position. The plant is fully compliant with zero liquid discharge and zero discharge to landfill. This provides the sustainability that is so vital to our business, ensuring continuity of supply to our customers at all times.

You actively promote the concept of sustainability in your business. Can you elaborate?

We see sustainability as having 3 cornerstones: financial, social and environmental. Without any one the others cannot exist. We are strongly focused on ensuring success and compliance in all these areas of the business so that we exist and continue to exist as a valuable company supporting industry in Africa. We have to ensure that we rigorously modify and apply our business model effectively in our business ventures so that we remain profitable and sustainable. We serve communities through committed programmes led by our associates who reach out to communities in need. On the environmental side, our Green Technologies approach, not only addresses the issue of providing safer chemical products to our customers, but ensures that we actively seek to engage our customers in partnering with them to solve their environmental challenges. We do this now and have done this here since 1971. Our sustainability reporting is in line with the global reporting initiative (GRI).

There is increased discussion on ensuring the sustainability of the pulp and paper industry as a whole by diversifying its product range to include biofuels production. What impact will this have on Buckman Africa as a chemical supplier?

Yes I agree that there are certainly areas where biofuels production will work. Integrated mills are already generating enough power to be completely self-sufficient,

Top left: The present Buckman Africa staff come together for a day of team building.

Top right: Excited employees stand next to a new tanker in 1990.

Above: Buckman Africa (then Laboratories) employees of 1981.

Right: Early technical staff next to one of Buckman Africa's first reactors in 1978.



I think it is just a matter of taking it a step further. Provided it remains viable, Buckman will support their customers in this regard if extensive biofuel production becomes a reality.

Looking to the future - perhaps another 40 years - how do you see Buckman's involvement/commitment to the pulp and paper industry going forward?

In order to survive and be sustainable, the pulp and paper industry has undergone significant changes over the past couple of years and there is no denying that it will continue to do so going forward. Buckman's commitment is that we will continuously ensure that we align ourselves with our customer's requirements, modifying our offer and leading change on an ongoing basis to ensure that we effectively help them meet their strategic goals. Our strategy is based on being a valuable part of the growth and success of the pulp and paper industry in Africa. I want to sincerely thank our highly valued customers for the support they have given us over the past 40 years. We have enjoyed a long and strong relationship with this great industry and our customers have allowed this to happen by engaging us in true partnerships that have created mutual success. I also want to re-assure our customers that there is a lot more to come from Buckman and we look forward to adding value to their businesses in the years to come. □