



ATMEI CONSTRUCTION

SINGLE-MINDED



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Some companies grow by spreading their wings; but one South African company is continuing to focus on the original business sector it started with

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Bulk tank being installed



When a fledgling business starts by bashing metal into one shape, it is understandable and quite normal that

expansion of the business comes about by bashing it into different shapes. Surprising then, that even after 40 years, the very specialist firm of Atmei Construction is still very firmly wedded to the market segment it chose when Bert Meiring and his partner Bill Atkinson began a small jobbing construction company in the petrochemical sector in the Gautang city of Krugersdorp, 30 kilometres north-west of Johannesburg.

“The founders started by installing what are known as BTF tanks,” explains project manager Justin Bode. “These are 2,000 litre bulk-to-farmer tanks used by oil companies to get fuel to outlying farms. They are pretty simple and robust containers about two metres long and one metre in diameter.”

The ‘At’ part of the Atmei name has long gone but the business still remains with the Meiring family. In the 1980s, Bert’s son-in-law Jacques Petrie joined the business and was soon putting his drive and energy into taking the company to new heights. Manufacturing facilities were expanded, new skills and machinery acquired and two other branches opened in other key parts of the country, bringing the total Atmei workforce to 250.

“Instead of diversifying,” says Bode, “the company strategy has been to concentrate on the petrochemical industry and dominate the installation side of things. After all, while there are farms or mines in South Africa,

there will be a need for fuel and lubrication handling systems.”

As such, by far the bulk of Atmei’s clients are either the fuel companies themselves or the mining houses where fuel installations are needed. But in the drive to be the market leader, the array of products and services has grown dramatically from the original small installation and maintenance work that was done.

“I wish there was some other expression that we could use,” says Bode, “other than ‘one-stop-shop’, but that is exactly what we are. We now have all the disciplines to design and build civil work, electrics, pumps and controls. We cost and engineer the whole process, taking full responsibility for sorting out any problems that might arise. The client appoints us and then receives a completed fully functioning installation.”

Atmei estimates that it has undertaken the majority of all mining industry fuel installation projects in South Africa. Any shutdown in mining production carries a massive cost and mines go to extraordinary lengths to ensure that the wheels don’t stop turning unless planned that way. One of the largest installations Atmei has carried out was at the Khumani Iron Ore Mine in the Northern Cape. The scope of work there



Pumping station

summarises most—but certainly not all—that Atmei does.

Bulk supplies of fuel are delivered to Khumani and stored in 16 by 82 cubic metre above-ground tanks. To constantly re-fuel the fleet of heavy earth moving equipment and light duty vehicles, Atmei supplied Khumani with an additional bank of five re-fuelling points fully illuminated for

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round-the-clock use. A state-of-the-art fuel data management system was integrated to the existing facilities and vehicles were fitted with tags and data transmitting devices.

The project also included an elaborate lube storage and dispensing facility with storage tanks for five different grades of oil, all the pumps, meters and hoses needed for lube dispensers at the vehicle workshops and a corresponding waste oil recovery system comprising tanks, pumps and sumps.

Where the mining process takes place underground, the mine operators need to make a fundamental decision whether or not to bring the vehicles they use to the surface for refuelling—with the inevitable loss of production time—or to take the fuel

underground to the vehicles. But at the pressures encountered with vertical head at 800 metres below ground level, diesel fuel is highly combustible and such an approach creates numerous health and safety issues.

Atmei has developed systems to ensure that underground re-fuelling can be carried out without danger. Rather than shipping the fuel underground in tanks and taking up valuable skip capacity, fuel can be taken underground by a pipeline inside the vertical shaft to a centralised point. Batching systems such as these are technically demanding to design and build but provide mine management with much more streamlined operations.

But regardless of where tanks are

and exactly how they are configured, an absolutely vital part of the mix, and one which Atmei claims sets it apart, is the ability to respond around the clock should any maintenance issues arise. “It doesn’t matter whether we were the original supplier or not,” says Bode. “If there is a leak or spillage that needs to be cleared up, we can get a response team there quickly.”

With such close links to both mining and petrochemical companies, it’s not surprising that Atmei is finding more and more work over the South African borders and into neighbouring territories. Already there are offices in Botswana and Namibia; and more offices may follow if recent contracts such as those it has won at a Mozambique coal mine and Zambian copper mine continue to flow.

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Diesel bowser



Lube service unit

As with most South African companies, Atmei takes its social responsibilities seriously and does what it can to improve the lot of those classified as previously disadvantaged. With too many still coming out of school with poor qualifications, Atmei runs a training system whereby youngsters are paired with an experienced mentor who will help them learn on the job. Those who show the necessary aptitude are then encouraged to take external educational and training programmes, with the aim of progressing within the company and eventually becoming a mentor for the next generation.

In order to thrive in South Africa, companies need a BEE partner which is the conduit for ownership and reward for

the black community. Atmei is currently in negotiations with a new BEE partner with the aim of lifting its current certification of level 4. Ironically, this may lead to the first diversification of the company in 40 years, as the partner in question is keen for Atmei to investigate involvement with projects related to renewable energy. “This won’t mean any less effort on our traditional work,” explains Bode, “but the additional investment this arrangement will generate will enable new business sectors to be explored.” **BE**

For more information about Atmei Construction visit: www.atmei.co.za



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