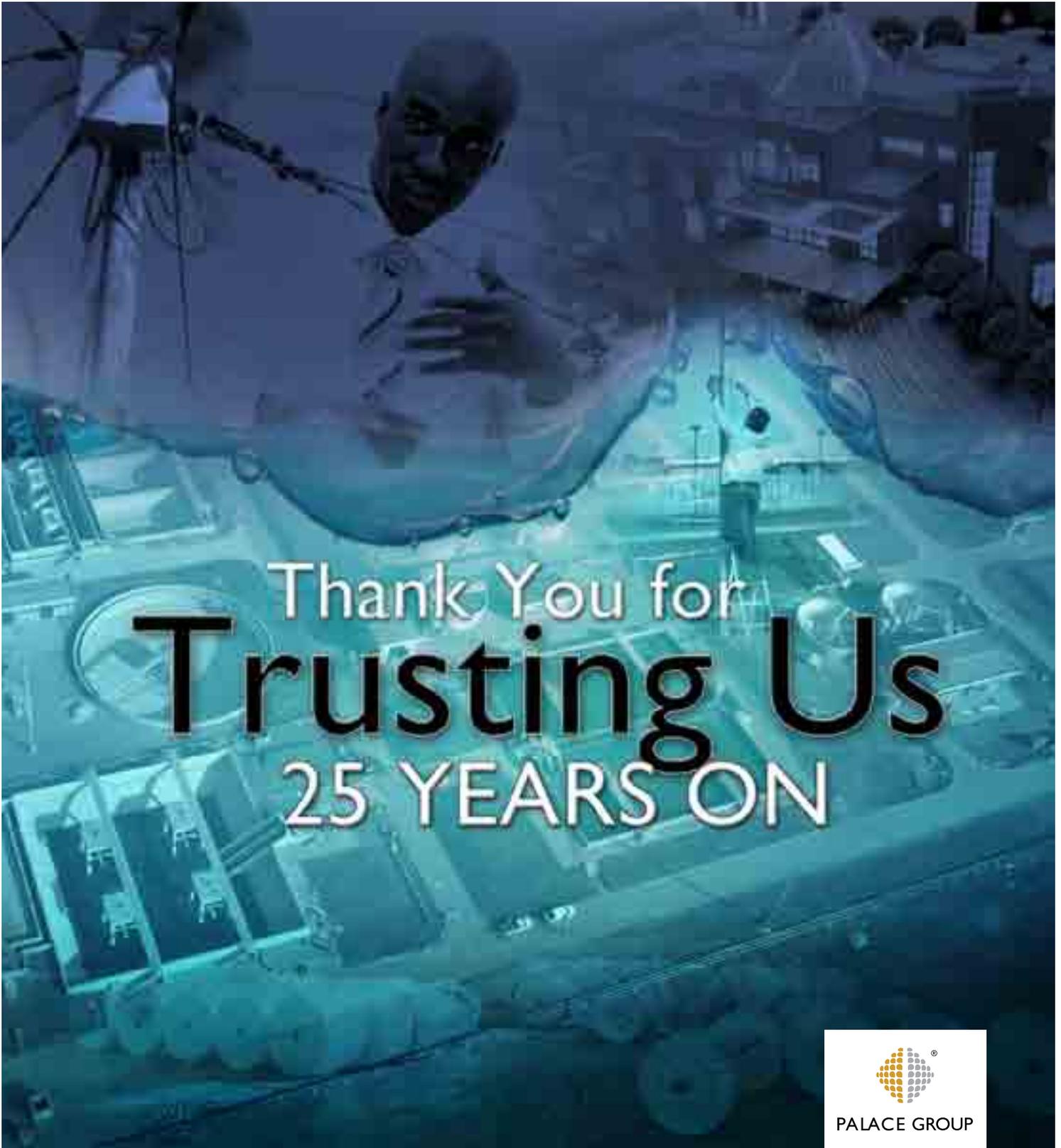


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HERALD



Thank You for
Trusting Us
25 YEARS ON



PALACE GROUP

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EDITORIAL

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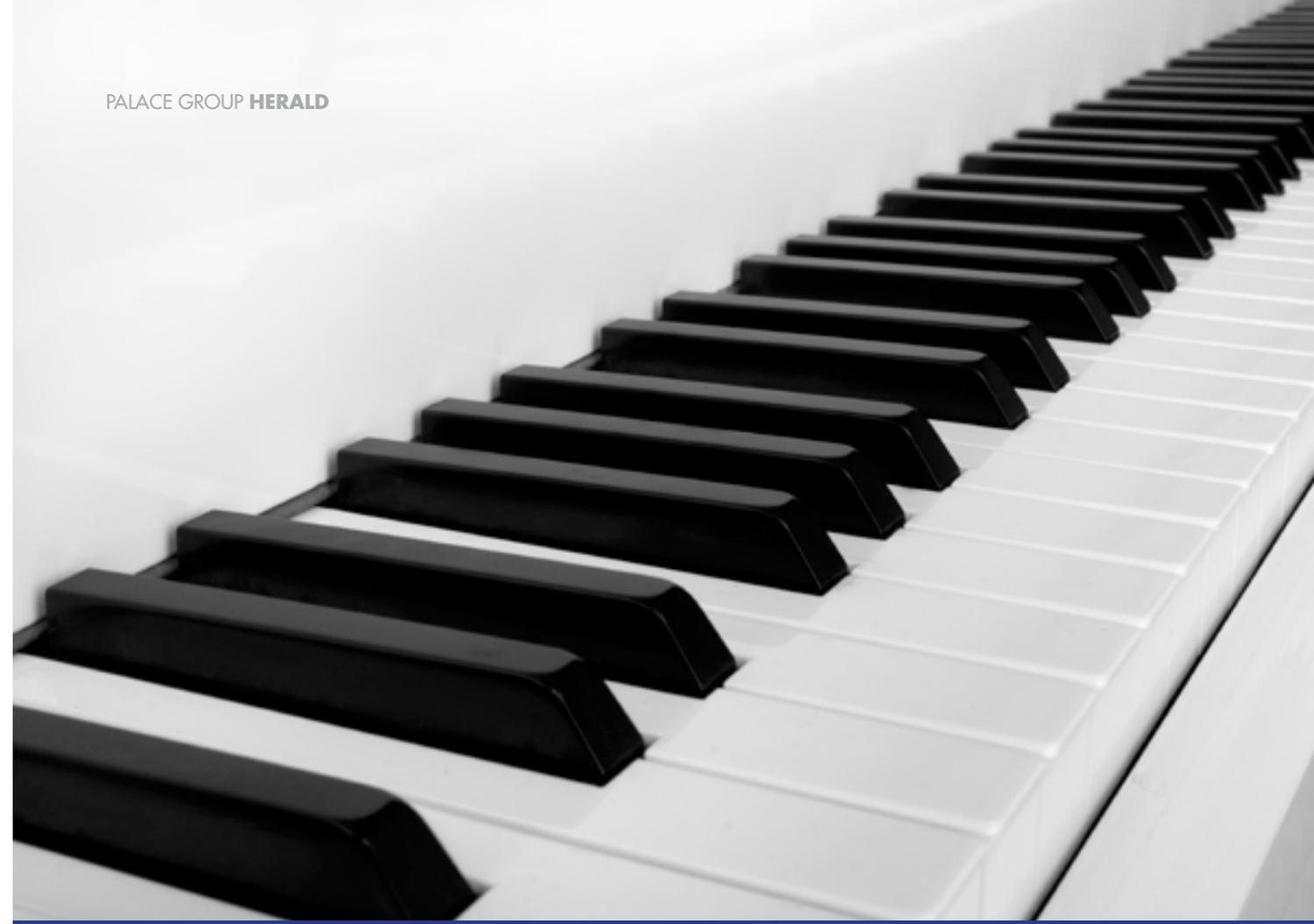
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Special thanks go out to all the interviewees who gave us their time and professional, expert opinions for the background on the subject articles in this special edition. We thank the staff who agreed to feature in this issue and share their memorable experiences too. We thank you as a customer and partner for the inspiration in putting together this issue.

Company website www.palacegroup.co.za

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executive chair

Orchestrating Business Partnerships into the Future

We are a Group with our eyes firmly set on a bright future. Having come a long way through a sometimes troubled past, (the Group was established in 1987) to where we are today, as one of the most noteworthy multi-disciplinary black controlled engineering groups, we acknowledge the role played by all our key stakeholders over the last twenty five years.

As a company, we are committed to continuous improvement. At Palace Group, we place your priorities at the core of our business and we will continue working closely with our clients and partners now and in the future. We do appreciate your support.

At Palace Group, we recognise that we have the opportunity to grow and take this company to new heights, and that remains our core focus as we look into the future, with you: old and new partners in this journey.

Stay with us and thank you for the past twenty five years, through your trust and support, we still stand.

Mlambo

Executive Chairman (Palace Group)



Messages from our staff on Palace Group's Twenty Fifth Anniversary

Alf Hare

Palace Technologies, divisional executive

Q: When did you start at Palace Group, and how long have you been working for the company?

A: I started in the first week of February 2008; I have been with the company for about five years now.

Q: What have your experiences been like at Palace Group?

A: Since I started I have been fortunate enough to have been involved in a number of key projects, the first being the Eskom hydro project. Even if the project didn't go ahead, the Lima project, where I was one of the project managers responsible for a portion of the project, was an exciting project and quite a challenge. On this project I was sent to Chicago which was a very exciting experience for me.

I was involved in another Eskom project in Richard's Bay where I was also project manager and, from this project, Palace was then invited and appointed to be part of a residential development project in Lephalale.

As a result of the success of the Lephalale project, Palace was then appointed for the Wilge project for which I am also project manager. I have developed a good relationship with the client, Eskom which has been a highlight of my career here at Palace Group.

I have also been tasked with the responsibility of investigating other projects or opportunities in other parts of Africa.

Q: Palace Group just turned 25 years old in October 2012, what can you say about this?

A: We are very fortunate to be working for such a company. It reflects a strong foundation and a lot of experience to fall back on; our challenge is to work on the next 25 years in such a manner that one builds his own personal legacy, the day that we are no longer with the company people must remember us for our contributions. If something is worth doing, it's worth doing well.

Dorcas Nkosi

Administrator & RAM

Q: How long have you been with Palace Group?



A: I started working for Palace in August 1995; I have been with the company for 17 years.

Q: What has been your best moment at Palace Group?

A: My best moment since I started working for Palace has been seeing the growth stages with the expansion of our services and product offering, as well as setting up of new branches in different parts of the country and the world.

Q: How has it been working for Palace Group?

A: What I have experienced and like the most about Palace Group is the atmosphere, it is one of cooperation and support, which I think is rare in today's workplace.

Q: What can you say to the Group, now that it is turning 25 years?

A quarter of a century in business...My warmest congratulations on a wonderful achievement: a great company with a wonderful group of people, and we all know that great people make great companies. Through leadership and dedication Palace was able to build such a group, and I am proud and appreciate you PG.

Ruth Kunene

RAM

Q: When did you start at PG and how long have you been working for the company?

A: I have been with PG for seven years now, I started in September 2005.

Q: Describe your experiences and your best moment at PG since you have been working here?

A: When I started working for PG, it was not easy for me because I was coming from a telecommunications company, and having to adjust to engineering life was a mission. What helped me a lot was the training that was given to me and learning from other staff from other branches that have been here before me.

My best moment in PG was when we attended the RAM workshop in Gauteng in 2008, the very first in a series of many that have since followed; to me it was like an outing but most importantly having to meet other RAMs from other branches and get-



ting to know how they work or do things. It was actually my wish to meet one day because I always had this idea that we as RAMs were doing different things even though we are working for one company in the same position.

I also had problems with differentiating between the PG divisions and other subsidiary companies. That workshop was really a learning curve for me.

Q: What is your message for Palace Group's 25th year celebration?

A: They say "you start somewhere to be somewhere", and Rome was not built in a day. I believe PG has seen a lot and still has a long way to go. All that I can say is that PG must grow from strength to strength. I wish Palace Group CEO, management and staff all of the best because if it wasn't for them, Palace would not be where it is today. HAPPY 25TH BIRTHDAY!!!

Sandiswa Mtuzula

Production supervisor at Grinpal Energy Management

Q: When did you start at PG and how long have you been working for the company?

A: I started working for Palace Group in October 2007, under the Group subsidiary Grinpal Energy Management; it has been almost five years.

Q: What has been your best moment at PG since you have been working here?

A: It was 15 December 2010 on our Christmas party, as the staff of Palace we were treated like Kings and Queens. We were showered with great food and in a very beautiful place, although I don't remember the name, the backdrop was the sea.

We spent the whole day there and that also gave us a chance to get know each better as we were playing games and challeng-



ing each other and later on exchanged gifts and I went home all smiles.

It is said that small things are the most appreciated ones as I was so happy with this gesture, because it made me feel and see that our hard work is appreciated and I felt the executives of Palace saying thank you and keep up the good work.

Q: Your message for PG's 25th year celebration?

A: I would like to say thank you for 25 years with opportunities full of growth, a second home (as we spend most of our time in the office), but mostly thank you for opening your doors to us and allowing us to showcase what we can do and a chance to learn and earn in mind and spirit, because I have testimony in my five years of how much my life has been changed by the opportunities that have been given to me. Thank you again Palace.

Taryn Visser

Draughtsperson

Q: When did you start at PG and how long have you been working for the company?

A: I started at PG in January 2005, so it has been seven years already.

Q: What has been your most memorable moment at Palace Group?

A: My most memorable moment since I started working for Palace was when I just had my son, financially times were very tough. When I went to draw some money, I noticed there was a big amount of cash in my account, it was my five year long service award, WOW it really came in handy!

Thank you Palace for making my life just a little bit easier.

Q: Your message for our 25th year celebration?

A: Congrats Palace, here's to another 25 years!!



**THANK YOU TO ALL INVOLVED
FOR BEING PART OF THE GROWTH**

Is Renewable Energy Bankable?



Significance of the topic

Recent calls for renewable energy bids by the South African Department of Energy have revealed support by SA banks to fund green projects. According to a report from Nedbank, for example, the bank has put its weight behind just over 30% of bidders in the DoE plan. This is quite a positive move and will ensure that renewable energy generation becomes a reality and that the South African renewable industry becomes prominent in the African and world landscape. But how bankable is renewable energy really? Is there a sound financial return for the business or private sector?

Very few renewable energy solutions in South Africa have been bankable until the South African Department of Energy made a deliberate effort to open the procurement process of renewable IPPs with a non-predetermined tariff. This opened a completely new chapter on the supply side of the power equation. Many a financial institution and, in particular, the big four in South Africa, are investing heavily in the South African renewable energy space.

Renewable energy was always bankable in a majority of the first world countries because of the off-take tariff regimes in these countries.

Defining Bankability

Financial services organisations have the ability to finance innovation and turn the climate challenge into market opportunities. The commitment from our banks strongly suggests that building the country's renewable energy sector is the right way forward, so exactly how bankable do they believe renewable energy projects are right now?"



The dictionary definition of the word bankable in a business context is something that is considered powerful enough to ensure profitability, but bankability is perceived and managed differently among stakeholders. The various players in this market seem to agree on the importance of bankability but there is no common understanding of its meaning. While banks typically emphasize the impact of stable cash flows on the project's long-term debt service, equity investors tend to focus on their expectations on investment returns, possible tax incentives and their portfolio strategies. Yet, to ensure a project's soundness, diligence in legal, technical and economic matters is imperative for both stakeholders.

A bankable renewable energy project has four key features:

- Proven technology
- Reliable fuel supply
- Revenue certainty
- Grid connection on reasonable terms

The first two can be addressed to a large extent by due diligence and adequate governance. The second two are where the government's and CEFC's attention should be fixed. According to Dennis Dykes, chief economist at Nedbank's economic unit, the process and slow delivery of projects is the barrier to success, not the financing of the infrastructure sector.

Financial backing from a renowned bank usually signals trustworthiness to installers and commercial investors and it also gives companies and their partners financial security. However, to achieve this greater degree of financial security, manufacturers have to be considered as 'bankable', ideally not only by one financial institution, but by a number of banks. In December last year, financial services group, Investec, and the European Investment Bank (EIB) contributed R100m to the renewable energy fund to promote clean energy generation and energy efficiency. The partners each contributed R50m to the facility, which was unveiled on the sidelines of the global climate negotiations in Durban.

According to Investec, its sector specialists and credit committee will evaluate projects in accordance with additional investment criteria set by the European Investment Bank to ensure that projects deliver environmental benefits and abide by certain business, environmental, social and labour practices. Soitec, a manufacturer of semiconductors and solar products has been financed by Investec in one of the largest projects using concentrated solar photovoltaic technology. An unusual project of this magnitude, being financed so quickly in an emerging economy is a positive step for South Africa and Soitec. Jenny Chase, head of solar analysis for Bloom-

berg New Energy Finance, estimated that the project might cost between \$150 million (R1.16 billion) and \$300 million.

The risk focus of banks is rightfully on each product brand and that brand's ability to manufacture a high-quality product, not on the industry as a whole or a specific category. In fact, banks do not hand out bankability 'certificates' to suppliers without first conducting a very detailed due diligence analysis. Nedbank remains committed to funding various renewable energy projects from landfill gas, to solar and wind turbine power. Nedbank provided the financial backing for approximately 37% of the more than 1,200MW worth of energy capacity represented by all the bids submitted in the first phase of South Africa's Renewable Energy IPP programme.



Mike Peo, head of infrastructure, energy and telecommunications at Nedbank Capital says that investment into renewable energy in South Africa is growing and this shows that the sector has economic growth potential. Peo also remains positive about the long-term economic and social development potential of the renewable energy programme. He believes that unlike almost all of South Africa's previous infrastructure development projects, the development of

the country's renewable energy industry is not a finite project and does not need to have an end date. Peo believes that South Africa can become a renewable energy hub for the African continent and that stakeholders in this fledgling sector should never lose sight of the fact that what we do in South Africa could ultimately be of great benefit to the whole of Africa.

According to Omar Vajeth, head of power and energy at Absa Capital, local banks are looking to put together R40bn to R50bn to fund projects for both round one and two of the South African Renewable Energy initiative (SARi). While Standard Bank gave an underwriting commitment of R19.1bn for the renewable project, Absa Bank also decided to give an underwriting commitment of R10.1bn. Alastair Campbell, Standard Bank director of mining, energy and infrastructure finance in corporate and investment banking, states that despite the rigid terms and regulations, solar power projects that are run by the South African Government as part of its Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Programme are able to thrive because of the financial support provided by the local lending market. Campbell believes that banks should be made the initial source of funding.

All in all, managing bankability is closely related to the concept of managing quality – and today quality is managed actively, with high attention given by companies' top management, as it serves as a key differentiation factor in global competition across many industries.



A financial and functional case for a Smart Water Meter



Smart water meters have functional and financial benefits. The meters operate in a similar manner as smart electricity meters and both the consumer and the utility or bulk water supplier stand to derive financial value from the installation of smart water meters.

According to the website www.pikeresearch.com, the smart water meter market is poised for steady growth in the coming five years, driven by increasing demand for water itself, ageing system infrastructure and a need among utilities to operate their systems much more efficiently. Some systems were built 50 to 100 years ago and badly need upgrading. As new pipes are constructed, utility operators will simultaneously evaluate the merits of upgrading to the latest meter technology as well. Additional forces that will propel smart water meter shipments will include the need to conserve scarce water supplies - especially in desert regions like the Middle East or the South Western United States - the need to reduce high levels of non-revenue water, and the need to satisfy regulatory requirements. Growth will also come from emerging markets in Asia Pacific and elsewhere as water metering rises along with increasing standards of living and the need to manage this valuable resource efficiently.

However, the report adds that in spite of these growth drivers, the industry faces several other factors that will be impediments to progress. For one, new smart meters cost more than standard water meters, presenting a budgetary challenge to many water utilities. Smart meters also require additional IT expertise to facilitate data collection and data management - not always a welcome change to risk-averse system operators. Many water utilities are concerned about potential push back from consumers, given the levels of resistance that some electric utilities have faced from cus-

tomers in their smart meter roll-outs. With the rise in prominence of smart water meters, as stated above, it is imperative that reference is made to the technology functionality and the capital costs associated with implementation of the technology. This has to be looked at together with the financial benefits to the consumer as the end user, as well as benefits for a municipality or a bulk water supplier.

How smart water meters function

Smart water meters integrate with other smart devices to create a whole ecosystem of home efficiency. This is achieved through the use of a smart water meter device; a user would use less water as s/he is paying directly for the water used. A user sees what s/he is paying for and thus is inclined to adjust his/her habits in order to minimise his/her costs. In a way, a smart water meter works similarly to a smart electricity meter. The difference is that a smart water meter measures and manages water usage and losses whilst a smart electricity meter measures and manages electricity usage and losses.

Since municipalities aspire to collect accurate revenue from consumers, i.e. end users of the meters, so consumers look for a simpler, more cost effective way of managing their expenditure on such costs for basic needs, like water.

A comparative view of the deployment of smart water meters

The research cited above states that smart water meters are an expensive technology. Indeed, the capital cost of a smart water meter is costly, but the lifecycle cost is far less than a conventional water



meter. That is the underlying reason why the uptake should be faster than imagined. However, according to reports done by research analysts, this is not happening at a rapid rate.

A report written by Neil Strother¹ (Pike Research, 6th April 2012) stated that the deployment of smart water meters remains a slow-moving segment of the smart grid market when compared to smart electric meters, but recent moves by various water utilities are somewhat encouraging. This report was specifically focused on the American market.

Simply put, asserted Strother, smart water meters lack some of the big drivers surrounding electricity and gas meters. Pike Research's most recent report, added Strother, on smart water meters, "Smart Water Meters", explains why. It notes that, in the US at least, stimulus money for projects has dried up and many water utilities lack the capital to invest in the more expensive meters on their own. Therefore, a slower approach is taken. Many utilities also lack the staff and skills to handle the increased volume of data that are the inevitable result of smart water meters being installed. Moreover, regulators have been less aggressive in mandating smart water meters in comparison to electricity.

In South Africa, the hurdles that are preventing the technology from being embraced by municipalities and utilities in general are somewhat different. The two main reasons are a lack of awareness of the product and that, for a long time, there had been nothing compelling South African municipalities to collect water bills from consumers for them to then pay the bulk water supplier. However, this appears to be changing as the water utilities are getting serious about their own revenue protection mechanisms. This compels water distribution utilities to do likewise.

In Europe, the deployment of smart water meters appears to paint a different picture to that of the South African market. Seth Cutler², writing for the online magazine, Water World, said that in Europe alone, smart water metering is expected to generate a cumulative investment of \$7.8 billion by 2020. He added that, should the investment environment improve, bolstered in part by strong government support, this market should grow further to \$13.4 billion over the same period. While initial investments are heavily in smart water meters and installation fees, data and network management quickly grows to provide a majority of yearly revenues for the market.

Figure 1. Smart Water meter market value projections, 2009 - 2020, 2009 (Europe)

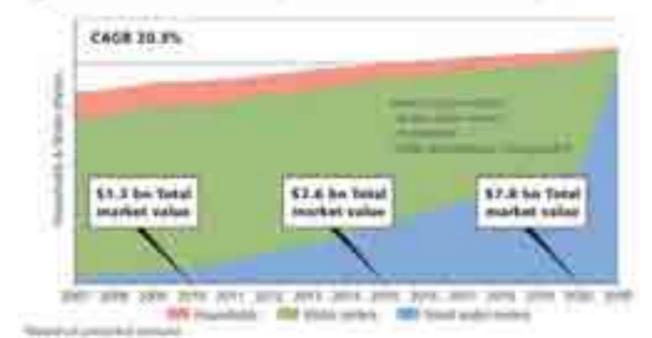


Figure 2. Smart grid market key market drivers and inhibitors in Europe, 2011-2020



Consider the following value proposition for this technology

For a municipality, efficient revenue collection and enhancement is a major advantage of smart water meters technology

Realising an increase in revenue collection in turn makes these entities profitable thus in a better position to deliver various services to the communities

A consumer gains control of their consumption, thus eliminating the disadvantageous matter of disconnections due to unpaid water bills without their being aware of or alerted to this fact

Smart water meters might help identify waste by being used by the water company to identify network leaks and by consumers to identify leaks on their properties, also allowing households to identify unnecessary consumption and identify inefficient appliances

In a nutshell, by paying for water consumption efficiently, it is the logical conclusion that the water tariff would decrease.

References

¹ Neil Strother is a senior research analyst contributing to Pike Research's Smart Grid practice, with a focus on smart metering technologies and related business practices. Strother has an extensive background in market intelligence focused on emerging technologies.

² Seth Cutler is a research analyst at industry analysts Frost & Sullivan. The article referred to is based on a report on expanding smart water metering and smart water grids.

Thank You

FOR TRUSTING US IN DELIVERING SOLUTIONS TO YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS
FOR GROWING WITH US
FOR BEING A CONSISTENT PARTNER & BUYER OF OUR SERVICES AND PRODUCTS
FOR THE PAST TWENTY FIVE YEARS



The birth of Palace Group

It was in October 1987 that the first subsidiary company, Palace Engineering Services (now trading as Palace Technologies) was formed and began its twenty-five year journey with the first projects being Eskom powered Kendall and Beta power stations. Taking a leap of faith, the founder and current executive chairman, Mbuso Dlamini, began his life as an entrepreneur and later became an employer of upwards of two hundred employees in present day Palace Group. Palace had its first offices right in the Johannesburg city centre, in fact, the first office was located on the fifth floor of His Majesty's Building at the corner of Eloff and Commissioner Streets, centre of Johannesburg.



Defining the next quarter of a century rests on our shoulders

The month of October holds a particular significance at Palace Group for two reasons. The first obvious reason lies in the fact that in October of 1987, Palace Engineering Services became the first subsidiary company to be incorporated into Palace Group. The other more subtle reason is that the executive chairman who is the founder of this Group celebrates his birthday on this month. Let us put things into perspective and tell you a story and you will see why we have every reason to be grateful to all our stakeholders for the role they have played in making it possible for Palace to reach the quarter of a century mark.



LEPHALALE

Palace Engineering Services (Pty) Ltd (now trading as Palace Technologies with the re-engineering of the brand focus of the Group in 2008), focused primarily on consulting engineering services (electrical, mechanical, civil and structural) and instilled a sense of trust in its first customers who remain the firm's customers even today. Testimony to its delivery of concise consulting services is the glaring fact that after twenty-five years, Palace Engineering still works on many projects for Eskom in various parts of the Republic of South Africa.



BKS-Palace Consortium was appointed by Eskom as Principal Agent for the construction of housing to accommodate personnel and contractors stationed at the Medupi Power Station Project. The Architectural Division of Palace Technologies was part of this project where about 1 280 houses and apartments were handed over to the client, and an additional 1 112 houses and apartments were designed. The 1280 houses were built and commissioned on about 15 different sites within 12 months, which represented an average of more than five houses delivered per working day for the entire duration of the construction period.



LESOTHO ARCHITECTURAL PROJECT



Following an international design competition, Palace Technologies was awarded the contract to render architectural services for the design and construction of the new Royal Palace in Maseru. Part of the scope of work was the investigation and implementation of energy efficient solutions, use of renewable energy and the management of water. The six-year project comprised mainly of four buildings: the New Palace, Chapel, Guest House and Tennis House. The project included both the official and private aspects of the Palace ensuring that the various buildings reflect the official status of Lesotho, its culture and its people, whilst still creating a modern look. The use of traditional elements and symbols were integrated in the structures, making use of the latest trends, materials and technologies. Palace Technologies ensured that the new Royal Palace was not only energy efficient, but financially viable in the long term.



Changing dynamics

As you can imagine, during the late eighties, right at the height of apartheid, it was not an easy feat for a black person to run a business. Palace's survival is a momentous occasion and points to the results of resilience that came with utilising each opportunity Palace received in doing work, to showcase the excellence in service and assisting our customer in fulfilling their objectives.

However, the dawn of a democratic South Africa presented Palace with an even bigger opportunity to grow and thus the move from the city centre to what was fast becoming known as a potentially thriving suburb, Midrand. Here, the company saw expansion not only in terms of projects and scope but we added more offices ranging from setting up smaller offices in Durban, Port Elizabeth, Cape Town, East London, Bloemfontein, Mbabane (Swaziland) and others. The focus was no longer on mere survival, but was about expanding and growing our market share and footprint, being visible and within reach of potential customers. The landscape was fast changing in the Republic with the promise and hope that the first democratic elections had brought. Being a black-led business was by this time starting to become sort of 'fashionable', something one took pride in.



JOZI STYLE

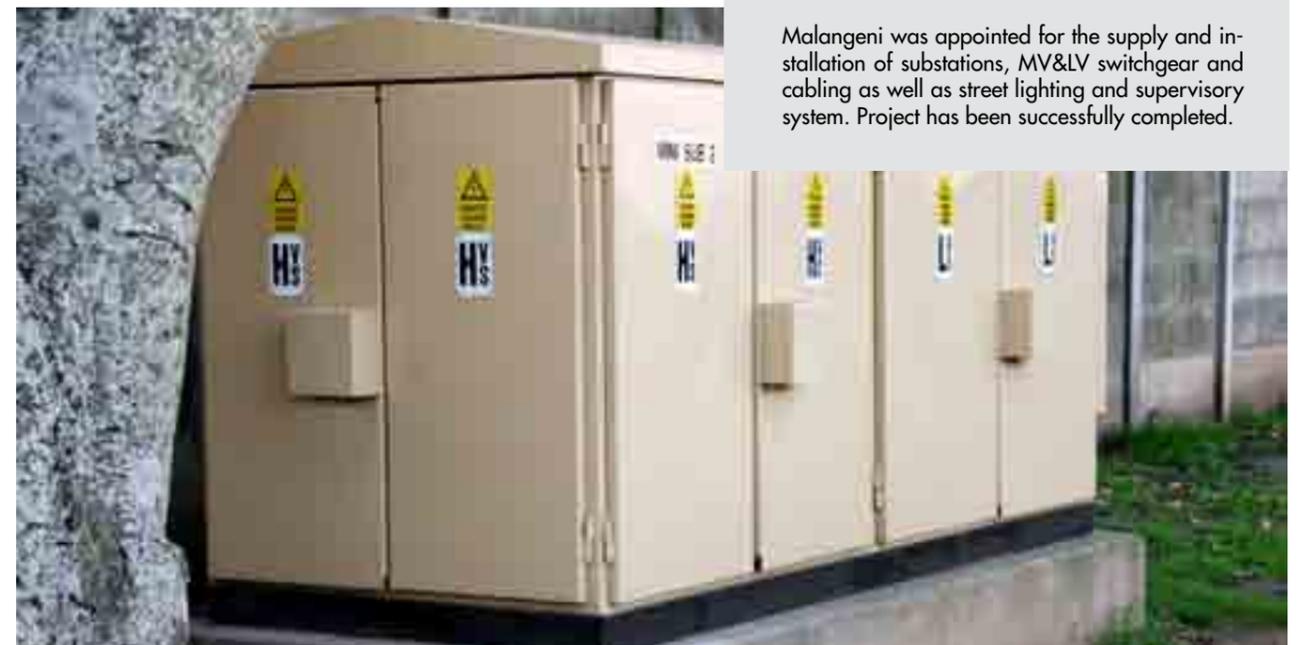
A design competition won by the Architectural Design Division to design a residential development system that reflects the City of Joburg whilst offering a greater degree of housing flexibility and choice.

The dynamics were further shifting in as far as services scope was concerned and as mentioned at the onset, the firm that was first incorporated provided consulting engineering services. After 1996, Palace expanded and started covering a variety of projects. Beyond consulting engineering, Palace began to cover architectural design services and had by now already begun its involvement in industrial based consulting projects, for example, water treatment plants. The company had also started participating in construction related works though this remains a secondary focus of the Group.



COEGA-NEWPORT CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

Malangeni was appointed for the supply and installation of substations, MV&LV switchgear and cabling as well as street lighting and supervisory system. Project has been successfully completed.



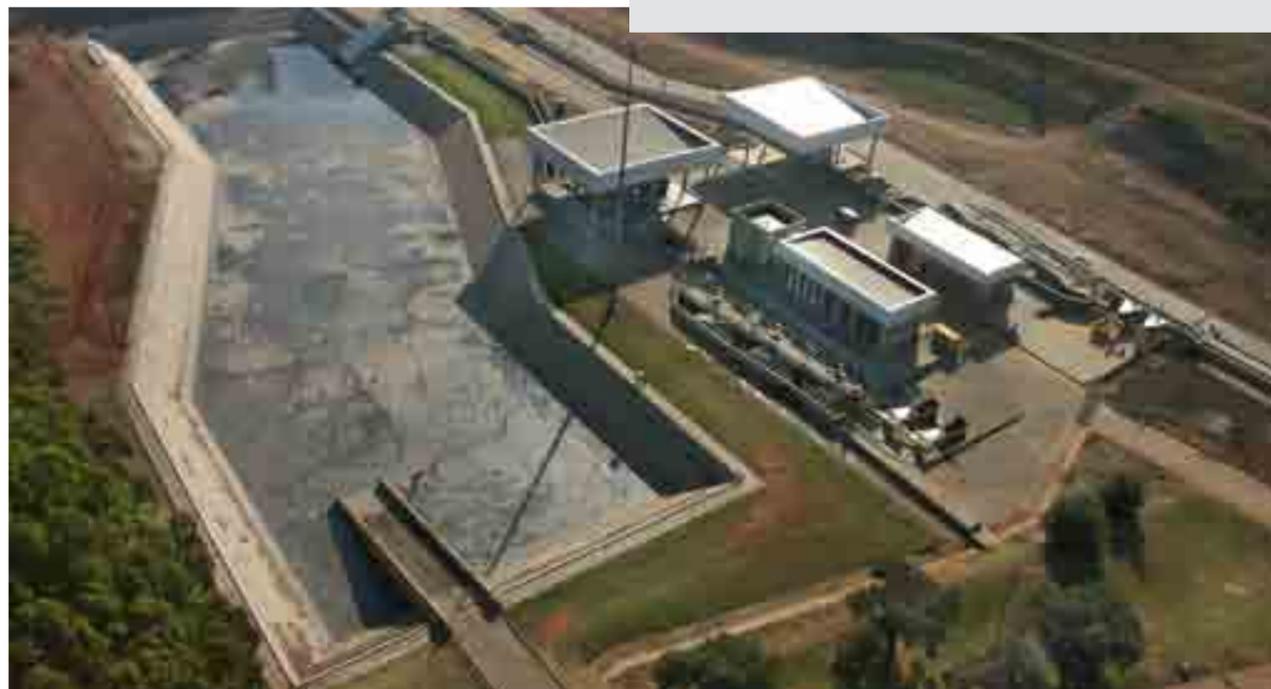


ERWAT PLANT

Palace Technologies is responsible for the mechanical and electrical engineering consulting work. This involves the preliminary design, detail design, preparation of tender documents, tender adjudication and thereafter Construction supervision and Project Finalisation.

Palace's joint venture partners (SSI) are responsible for the civil engineering scope. The project management for the entire project is a shared Palace and SSI responsibility.

This Project (Sludge Digestion and Dewatering) is a follow-on project from a previous project (Module 4 Expansion). The Module 4 Expansion project was for the construction of an additional 50 ML per day module for the Waterval Water Care Works. The project is currently being finalised.



A brand defined

The new millennium saw the change in information consumption with the growth of the use of the internet and also the growth of brand consciousness even within traditional engineering firms.

Post 2000, Palace was still very much perceived purely as 'Palace Engineering' a provider of consulting engineering services. Yet, there had been an expansion on scope that was as yet undefined to our internal and external customers.

This led Palace Group to resolve to commission projects aimed

at developing a re-positioning strategy of the company's brand, to suit the changes that had been taking place. This was further aimed at communicating precisely what the Group was, matching that with the business strategy going forward, across all the relevant stakeholders, from employees, customers, business associates and the communities amongst others.

The project would culminate in a new corporate identity being adopted that continues to define who the company is, and plays a key role in growing the Group's brand presence in the market place.



Palace Group Corporate Identity from 1988 - 2008



PALACE GROUP

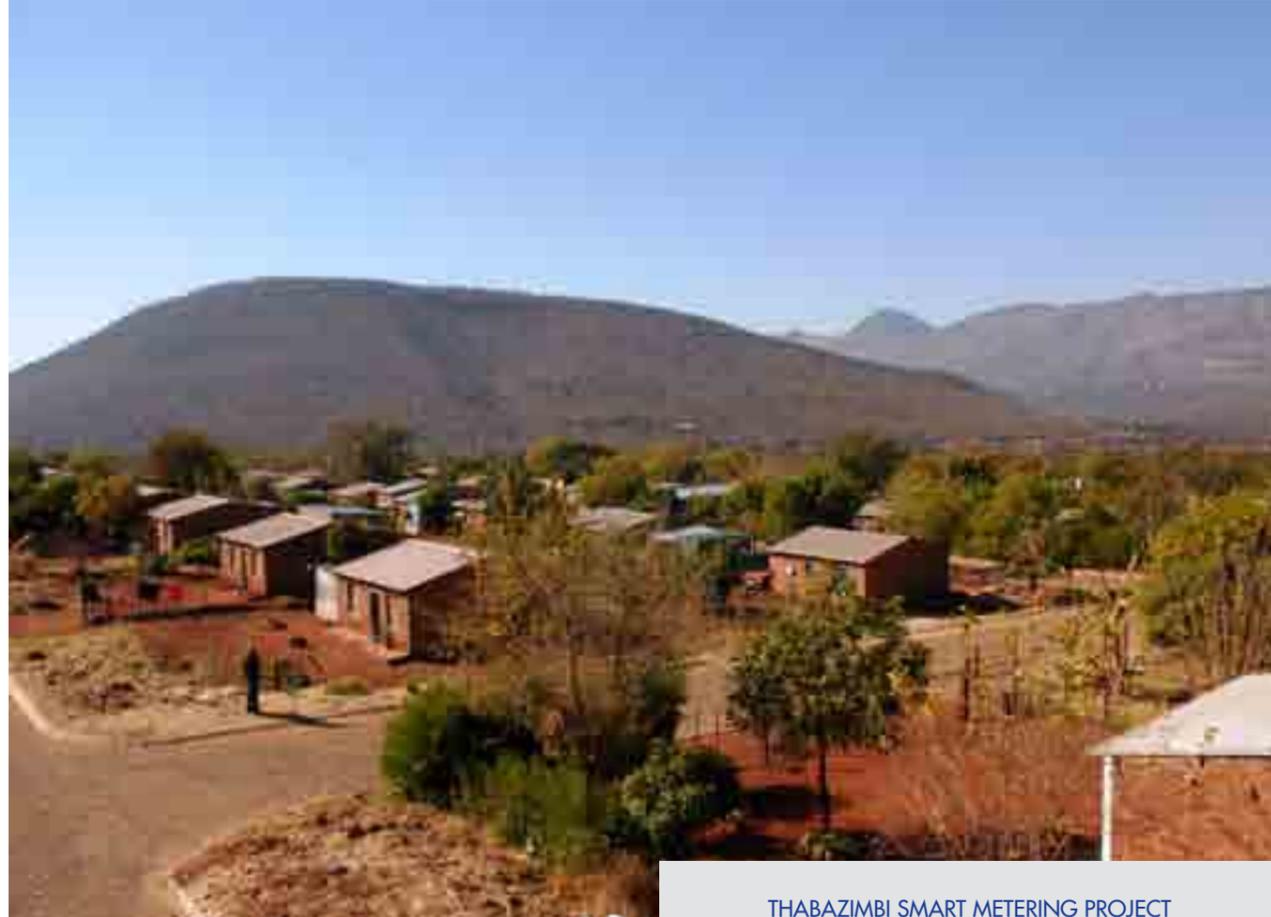
Palace Group Corporate Identity from 2008 to date

Other projects over the last decade have included



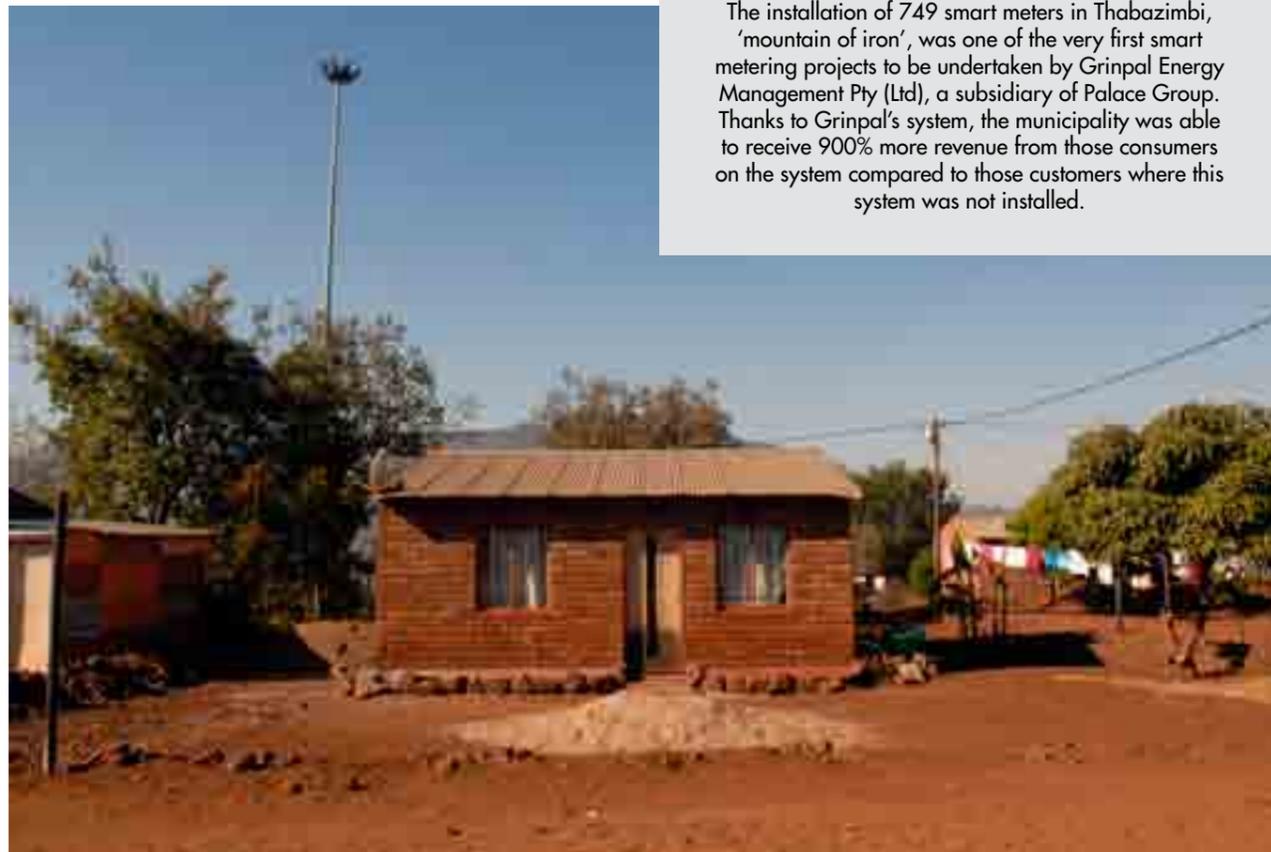
SWAZILAND POLLY-PACK PROJECT

The Government of Swaziland appointed Palace Engineering Services as part of a \$40 million project for Polly-Pack Factory. The project involved the supply of various 11 kv/400v Mini-substations around the perimeter of the two existing factories.



THABAZIMBI SMART METERING PROJECT

The installation of 749 smart meters in Thabazimbi, 'mountain of iron', was one of the very first smart metering projects to be undertaken by Grinpal Energy Management Pty (Ltd), a subsidiary of Palace Group. Thanks to Grinpal's system, the municipality was able to receive 900% more revenue from those consumers on the system compared to those customers where this system was not installed.



RICHARDS BAY HEALTH AND RISK ASSESSMENT

Gondwana Environmental Solutions, a member of Palace Group companies, was appointed by the Department of Agriculture, Environmental Affairs and Rural Development in KwaZulu Natal, in partnership with the uMlathuze municipality to supply and install ambient monitoring systems as well as to conduct a health study and health risk assessment as a consequence of exposure to atmospheric contaminants.

INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS UPGRADE

Palace Consulting Engineers were appointed by ACSA for both the Durban International Airport Upgrade and the air conditioning and ventilation installation for the new domestic terminal at OR Tambo International. The rand value of both projects was in excess of R485 million.



What you need to know about Palace Group

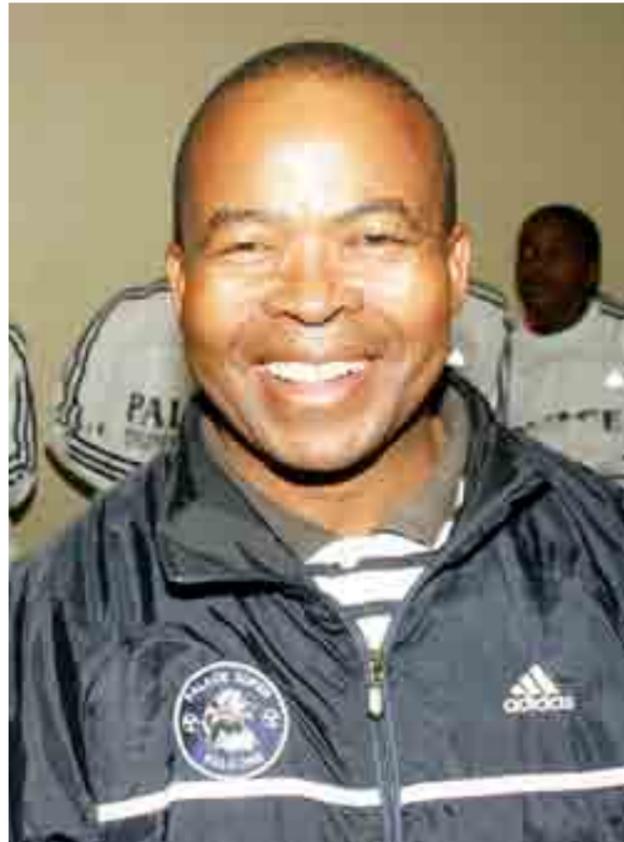
- The company was established in October 1987
- The company currently employs more than two hundred full time employees
- Areas of interest are; consulting engineering & architectural designs including green building elements, smart meters – electricity, water and gas, environmental solutions, project & programme management and manages turnkey projects and solutions as well
- The company delivers on projects from different parts of the world through strategic partnerships

By: M Zanele Mlambo (Ms) (Group Executive: Strategic Communications, Social Responsibility and Corporate Image)

Behind every successful soccer team...

There is Bra Bob

Steyn "Bra Bob" Maredi: Palace Super Falcons Technical Director



by Felicity Dire

Anyone who occasionally browses through the newspapers or watches the rarely broadcasted soccer matches for Banyana Banyana, the national women's soccer team, may have heard of the sterling performances of the Palace Super Falcons' (PSF) players; the likes of Portia Modise, Mamello Makhabane, Janine van Wyk and Kgadi Mokoma, to name but a few. What may not have been seen or heard is the diminutive technical director of PSF, Steyn Bob Maredi, simply called Bra Bob by the team players. Yet this is the man behind the record rise to the top of women's soccer in South Africa. He formed the team from the ground up, securing financial resources and loyal backing from Palace Group.

From humble beginnings

Maredi was born in White City, Jabavu in Soweto. At the age of seven he already had a soccer nickname, 'Pro', from his debut at White City Stars Football Club where he started his soccer career. From here, he seemed to have a clear career path as he moved from one football club to the next. He has been part of teams such

as Western Rangers FC, Brave Lions FC and Tiny Rockies FC, all situated in various parts of Soweto. From Tiny Rockies FC he joined the very first reserve side of Kaizer Chiefs FC when it started in 1970. However, due to a prolonged injury, he was not selected for promotion to the main team.

Taking on the world stage... of a different kind



After this disappointment in soccer, Maredi made a complete turnabout and change in career path when he left his soccer boots and donned a costume, starting a career in theatrical acting. He was featured in stage plays such as Cry (written by Maishe Mponya), Peace and Forgive and the acclaimed Hungry Earth. He has received numerous positive reviews on his performance in Hungry Earth and other plays. The cast of Hungry Earth later went on a tour in the UK, but he was unable to join them due to difficult financial circumstances.



Undeterred by this latest disappointment, he went on to write a play called Ruthless, which was a three-man stage play, a story about prisoners awaiting trial and depicting the ruthlessness of prison life. At that time, unfortunately, theatre was not very popular and soon Bra Bob found himself missing his first love; football.

Maredi restarted his football career by joining a club called Diepkloof United Scientists, but was disappointed to learn that young players were not being properly developed as the focus was pri-

marily on the players in the first team. As a result, Bra Bob started a development team called Diepkloof Wailers FC, whose name was inspired by reggae legend Bob Marley and The Wailers.

Maredi realised that his passion lay in the development and nurturing of young talent as is evident from the number of teams he has coached. When he relocated to Midrand he joined the Midrand Tigers as a coach for the under 10 boys and also joined the SAFA Gauteng team of coaches. Whilst in his coaching position at Midrand Tigers, he formed a team called the Super Eagles that was to cater for financially challenged players that came from the surrounding communities of Midrand. In his position in the SAFA Gauteng Coaches Club he was also responsible for coaching Under 12, 14 and 17 boys as a regional coach.

A new challenge: the birth of Palace Super Falcons

One afternoon whilst he was jogging in Rabie Ridge as part of his daily routine, he was approached by three girls who asked him to train them. "But I asked myself, how do you start a football team with only three players?" says Maredi. Two weeks later he had over 22 girls who were eager to start a footballing career, a team of girls who had never kicked a ball in their lives, a team called Palace Super Falcons. "That was the most difficult task I had ever encountered in football," quips Maredi.

Bankability of women's soccer

With the bulk of corporate sponsorships channelled to male sports such as rugby, cricket and of course, soccer, the main question was whether it would be worth it for the private sector, whose main intent is to promote their brands through sports sponsorships, to invest in women's soccer. "I definitely think it is, and I would implore the corporate world to invest their sponsorship money into the sport," states Maredi.

He emphasises though that, until women's soccer is raised to a professional level here in South Africa, we will not see much improvement in world rankings.



A man with a unique passion for soccer



With a broad smile as if to say he has defeated all odds, Bra Bob indicates that he hails from a family of boxers. His father and uncles before him were boxers and it was also the path they had tried to steer him in.

"I would hear nothing of it, I tried it for a while but I just could not bear it", he says matter-of-factly. He declares his love for football in no ambiguous terms, indicating that he also used to play football in the dusty streets of Soweto, where peers would challenge each other and even place bets on the mini tournaments they would host.

"I have a passion for the game. I think it is my calling...my gift. It can be difficult and very challenging at times, but if you love something enough you make means to make it work," adds Maredi.



Bra Bob the family man

Every man needs a good support system at home and Bra Bob is no exception. He is a married father of three (from a previous marriage) and is a grandfather too. Maredi speaks fondly of his grandson, whom he totally adores, as with many granddads.

Whilst one may have thought he lives and breathes soccer and would have little, if any, spare time to spend on anything else, he surprisingly emphasises the importance of spending time with loved ones.

"On Sundays I make it a point to go to church and spend time with family over lunch and then I take my camping-chair, glass in hand and listen to some jazz. I also enjoy regular stage plays and try to watch as many as I can," says Maredi.

The road ahead

Palace Super Falcons plan to maintain their good run in the domestic league. The long-term goal is to have a fully operational women's soccer academy.

"I am not planning to go anywhere as yet," concludes Maredi. There is no doubt that Palace Group, Sasol and other companies who have invested in grassroots women's soccer will not live to regret it, if such committed and hardworking soccer administrators exist in the sport. However, repeating the feat of the last two or three years will be hard to do, given the fact that every team wants to beat the Palace Super Falcons. Maredi can now focus on the task of proving himself once again.



Quick tit-bits

Does he follow a common "ritual" before a soccer match?

When asked this question, Maredi laughs then starts off by saying that his ritual includes prayer, first and foremost. Personally, he prays the night before any game and, once the game has begun, he will find a quiet spot where he can watch the game and take notes to refer to the coach and players at the first half break. During his quiet moments, he will not tolerate any disturbance from anyone.

Which players have been his best players since he has been involved in women's football?

In the current team he points out Kgadi Mokoma, a lethal striker, Mamello Makhabane and Refilwe Koloba. In the past teams he refers to Sesebo Mkgopa and Belinda Nkosi. But he points out that he is proud of all of his players, past and present, for they all played a role in the team's success.

What moments have been his best and worst moments in women's football?

Being the humble individual he is, Bra Bob indicates that there aren't any moments that stand out particularly, however, he thoroughly enjoys each match won at national championship level. "I enjoy myself as we beat other teams and at margins that are unanticipated at that level. We score about five goals or so," he says chuckling.

The worst moment was when, due to poor facility maintenance, Moroka Swallows bagged three points and a walk-over because of minor ground markings that were incorrect. "A single line cost us three points and a match," he laments.



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BEYOND THE TITLE

Gert Gous

Tell us briefly about yourself.

Follower of Jesus, husband (married for 31 years- to the same wife, I must add), father of three sons, grandfather of two. One of the highlights of life is to have grandchildren – what a joy!

Tell us about what you do here at Palace Group.

I head up the technology division. The main responsibility is to develop products in the revenue management business for the group. This includes electricity, water and gas meters and metering systems.

How long have you been with the Group and how has it been thus far?

Having started at Grintek in 1991, from Grintek and Grinpal it has been more than 20 years. The tenure at Palace Group started when I got involved in the management of Grinpal in 2002. Palace Group owned 50% of that company and later in 2009 bought out Saab Grintek. The group has since re-structured the business and I am now working for Palace Power Systems, which is the IP holder for the technologies that were originally started at Grinpal.

What has been your most memorable moment in the Group?

There is no single event that stands out – but seeing the product we develop mature and become more and more applicable to the challenges this country and the world face is satisfying. It is also satisfying to see a group of developers building a strong and competent team.

Palace Group is turning 25 years this year, what can you say to the Group?

This milestone is indeed impressive – times are extremely tough and the world as we know it, in South Africa, Africa and worldwide is changing rapidly and on a scale that has never been seen in history to date. To survive and flourish in these times needs insight and resolve on a different level than 10 years ago.

You are keen on extreme sports- tell us about that? What type of sports do you do?

Life is for living. We have so many opportunities to explore our brief stay on this earth so we must grab all opportunities to find



our purpose and fulfil it. I have participated in many exciting and even adrenaline pumping sports such as paragliding, underwater hockey, scuba diving, wrestling, road cycling and mountain biking. I like physical activity, it helps me to unwind and relieve stress.

You recently had a sporting accident; tell us about that and how it has impacted on your life.

I had a bad mountain biking accident about a year ago; that is slowing me down now, but I am positive that I will fully recover. It was a very intense time for me and my family but I saw God's grace through the entire ordeal and He has pulled me through it, in a very real and practical way – from warning me several times about the impending event and how to prevent it (although I did not realise it at the time), to making sure my cell phone was with me and survived the fall (I left my cell in the hotel room and turned around to go and fetch it, my cell phone was in my back pocket of my cycling shirt, I cracked my back in two places but yet the cell phone came out of the fall unscathed), to sending a farmer to find me in the forest in a most unusual way. The story itself will be pages long if I expand on the events. I have learned to be more patient, you have no choice if you have to lie on your back for months. I have currently started competition shooting as it is not physically demanding and I am fortunate that I can cycle again, albeit not very fast or extreme until I am fully recovered.

What motivates you, what drives Gert?

Every man and woman is created for a purpose and a reason and you have to find what your purpose is in life, you only have one shot at it. Take responsibility, be accountable and do not shift blame. Try, make mistakes, we all do, forgive yourself and forgive others. You cannot live in the past. Treat others like you would like to be treated. Try your best in all. Excel in your work; do it as if unto God.

Lastly, if you could meet anyone in the world (dead or alive), who would it be and what would you say to them?

It would be Jesus Christ and I would ask him why he designed women and men so differently; why do they think so differently and perceive and experience life so differently?



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