

Sitona grows with Bell fleet

In the Tswana language, the word for growing bigger is "sitona". In Rustenburg, in the North West Province, there is a company that has done exactly that but, by their own admission, not without the support and encouragement of a leading original equipment manufacturer.

Walter Kinnear founded Sitona Mining & Consultants (Pty) Ltd in Rustenburg in 2005. Having cut his teeth in mining and spending some considerable time working for other contract mining and material handling companies, he felt confident to go it alone albeit in a very competitive market.

"I had a fair amount of experience and knew a lot of people in the mining business when I started working in the processing plant of a chrome mine, armed with four wheeled loaders and three 10-cubic metre rigid tipper trucks," he tells us. "We have been very fortunate to have expanded our business to include opencast mining, blasting, plant hire, transport, civil construction and labour hire."

Within a year of starting Sitona Mining & Consultants, Kinnear needed to buy more equipment and he turned to Bell Equipment for this purpose. "I had picked up firsthand experience of products manufactured and serviced by Bell Equipment when working for an erstwhile employer and felt confident that this was the way to go, to spread the load of our capital equipment, so to speak," he says. "Our brand loyalty to Bell Equipment goes further than just the quality of their products as I will explain to you in a moment."

Sitona Mining & Consultants' first Bell products, acquired in 2006, consisted of three Bell B20D Articulated Dump Trucks (ADTs), two Bell 315SG Tractor Loader Backhoes (TLBs) and a Bell 1206 Rigid Tractor with a 9-cubic metre dump trailer.

"When I first met Bell Equipment's CEO, Gary Bell, we were still a small company but by the way Gary treated me, one would have sworn that we were massive Bell clients and I have never forgotten that," Walter says with a smile. "And looking back, I can say that Bell Equipment and our company have walked a long way together."

"What makes our industry different is that we work for 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and this is something that Bell Equipment fully appreciates," he adds. "Working in the field that we do, with heavy and abrasive materials, we know that mechanical equipment will have breakdowns but we have to limit our breakdowns (to no longer than four hours) and this is where we rely so heavily on Bell Equipment for backup - we're grateful for the loan machines that they've always been able to assist us with when necessary."

Sitona Mining and Consultants bought their first Bell Wheeled Loader, an L1506D machine, in 2007. The Loader had been shown to the company on a demonstration and so impressed Kinnear and his team that they promptly bought it. Since then, the company has owned several Bell L1506, L1806 and L2106 D and E model Wheeled Loaders.

"We've always believed that the ideal term to finance a machine, such as a Bell Wheeled Loader, is 36 months," Walter continues. "If you attempt to do it over a shorter period, you then price yourself out of the market and considering that some of our Bell Loaders can rack up 10 000 hours in a mere 18 months, we feel comfortable financing our machines over 36 months." Walter goes on to say that ideally, such machines should be replaced at anything between 10 000 and

14 500 hours, depending on the site and type of material the machine worked in. Due to their high production rates, most of Sitona's Bell Loaders are also bought with extended warranties to 10 000 hours on their wet drive-trains so replacing the machine once it is out of warranty, makes sense.

"We're proud to tell you that we have a training centre where we train diesel mechanics, who are in short supply in our industry," says Hannes Beket, Sitona's Plant Director. "Training our own mechanics and having them pick up valuable experience on our mechanical fleets, has a long-term benefit, especially in terms of high mechanical availabilities and good fuel economy that is so vital to our industry."

"Even where we work mostly on dry rates, we know that when we push a Bell L2106E Wheeled Loader into a new operation our client is going to benefit from a machine that only burns around 13 to 15 litres of diesel an hour," Hannes says.

"We're still growing as a company and while we are now gaining confidence to also look at growing our opencast mining division, we will again talk to Bell Equipment as we know we can rely on their superior products and proven back up," Walter says.

