

# Former SAPPI forester builds a contracting business with Bell

**Emmanuel Mashile is a qualified forester with a difference. He is business-minded too and, judging from his dabbling in retail sales and services, it must have been clear to everyone that Emmanuel would soon become self-employed.**

Emmanuel grew up amongst the forests of Graskop and Sabie. So when he finished high school, it did not come as too much of a surprise to his parents, who both worked in the timber industry, that he planned to study forestry at the Saasveld Forestry College situated between George and Knysna.

“After qualifying, my first job was with the Hans Merensky group in Tzaneen, where I worked as a Junior Harvesting Forester for a year,” he says. “I then joined Sappi at their Ngodwana Division and was fortunate to be appointed as a Management Forester, a position I held for five years. I gained lots of experience working in both gum and pine plantations.”

During that time, Emmanuel came into firsthand contact with Bell Loggers as his teams used them every day to load timber infield, at roadside depots and rail sidings. Little did he know what the future would hold for him.

“I’m quite business-minded and I am forever looking for gaps in the market: be it in direct sales or services,” Emmanuel continues. “I had started an internet café in my home town of Graskop and for a while owned a hair salon in the Riveside Mall in Nelspruit and managed to sell these businesses once they were established.”

Emmanuel currently owns a manufacturing business in Nelspruit, which specialises in glass and aluminium and services both retail and wholesale sectors with garage doors, shop-fronts and shower doors. He covers the entire Mpumalanga, Swaziland and parts of Mozambique, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal.

“I have always wanted to be self-employed, especially in forestry and I must commend my former employers Sappi, for recognising my entrepreneurial skills and drive,” Emmanuel says. “With Sappi’s encouragement, I applied, through a strict tender process, for the contracts they had advertised and was fortunate enough to become a preferred supplier.

He resigned from Sappi in July 2015 and started his own contract timber harvesting company, which he calls Dikwata, the Sotho word for timber. He landed his two contracts with his erstwhile employer Sappi in October 2015.



(From left): Johan Visser (Sappi Management Forester Harvesting), Alvin Bronkhorst (Sappi Harvesting Manager Highveld Area), Emmanuel Mashile (Owner, Dikwata) and Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Charles Inngs.

“These were and still are exciting times for me as I looked to be working in the Sappi Highveld Area just north of Piet Retief, where I would be tasked with felling and extracting timber and doing the short-haul to roadside for the first contract and then unloading timber at the rail siding and loading rail trucks for the second contract.”

“Fortunately the loading contract kicked off first and I could hire in two Bell 225A Loggers for that task as the felling contract only commenced in January 2016. The later start gave me room to build up some cash flow as I needed to pay my staff and the hiring of the Bell Loggers,” he adds. “As a start-up company and with contracts in hand, I could confidently apply for financing from the National Empowerment Fund to buy forestry equipment, which was delivered to me in January 2016.”

Emmanuel would need to contribute to the start-up capital and with five-year contracts awarded to him, he could repay the loan over five years at preferential rates.

His choice of loading and material handling equipment fell on Bell 225A Loggers as they were the machines of choice for so many operators in the timber industry and he had firsthand experience of their legendary toughness in all types of terrain. The short-haul side would see him using a Bell 1716A Rigid Haulage Tractor with a 25-tonne timber trailer obtained from another supplier.

Alvin Bronkhorst is Sappi’s Harvesting Manager for the Highveld Area and he is pleased to welcome Emmanuel and his Dikwata staff to his area. “We know what Emmanuel is capable of and have set him the steep target of harvesting 50 000 tonnes of Eucalyptus for us per year, felling and cutting this hardwood to length,” he says. “With the rail-siding loading contract, he will also have his work cut out for him and we were very pleased to see that he has invested in quality equipment from Bell Equipment.”

“When you negotiate the contract, you have to put forward your working method as well as your business plan,” Emmanuel explains. “Fortunately my past experience taught me what systems work and mechanisation is definitely the way to go. I should also mention the guidance I received from Charles Inngs, the Bell Sales Representative in Nelspruit.”

“This is the reason why I bought four Bell 225A Loggers, one for the infield harvesting side and three for the rail-siding loading contract where we would need to load a block of 40 rail wagons, within a 24-hour cycle. I am fully confident that our Bell 225A Loggers will see us through for many years to come.”

