

# Partnerships and collaboration extend supplier's network

MechChem Africa visits the Parkhaven head office of BI and talks to Ross Trevelyan and Burtie Roberts about new strategies for taking product to market in South Africa's constrained economy.



**W**hile not a lot has changed with respect to what we do and the brands we offer, we are winning nice orders in the mining industry and starting to see more interest. No fireworks, the economy remains suppressed, but by becoming more driven, determined and innovative, we are progressing," begins Trevelyan.

"In fact," Roberts continues, "August is 14% up on the same month last year, and it's all down to the hard work we have put in to capture increased market share. We are not an exclusive distributor of many of the brands we sell, so we need to work doubly hard to compete with other components suppliers,

large and small, that are spread across the length and breadth of the country," he notes.

"So we focus heavily on service and value-add, getting our people knowledgeable about the products and their niche applications, then getting them out to customers to find out what we can deliver that will improve reliability, extend life and reduce the costs of their operations.

"We have taken on the challenge. In the current circumstances we all have to work very hard and, as a result, we are securing a number of successful orders," Roberts adds.

Of particular note is BI's success in the expansion of the coal-mining sector in the Northern Province for the new-build power station there. "This is a multi-million rand project for our bearings and housings for a stacker-reclaimer installation," Trevelyan tells MechChem Africa.

"What is novel about this is that the mine has chosen split spherical roller bearings from FAG for the installation. These have excellent ratings, particularly for radial loads, and they are designed to fit into standard housings. They are ideal for use on large systems where the replacement of unsplit bearings would require costly additional work: the removal of



FAG split spherical roller bearings offer cost savings through rapid bearing replacement in difficult-to-access bearing locations.

gears or couplings, the dismantling of drives or the dismantling of shaft power trains. By using split spherical roller bearings, maintenance downtime of the machinery and plant reduces significantly, which is vital for a coal mine directly servicing the power industry," he explains.

"In addition, though, we have an excellent relationship with the mine. We have invested in onsite stores with consignment replacement stock, which puts us in an ideal position to service the client very rapidly when maintenance support is required," continues Roberts.

"Keeping replacement stock to support sales is another of our key competitive advantages. We strive not to have to go back to our OEMs for replacement components, because we know that lead times cause downtime, which usually costs the customer much more money than components and repairs," argues Trevelyan.

Citing a recent success in the cement industry, Trevelyan says that the company's premium brand Rexnord chain has become very well respected for use on bucket elevators in that industry. "For this client, the Rexnord premium chain product has now become a brand preference because it has proven to outlast the original products used," he says.

"Also, we have secured a second large order for our mid- to upper-tier Kobo chain product, which is relatively new to us and one of our exclusive brands. Repeat orders are always satisfying because they prove how well a product has performed and the excellent returns that it offers," Trevelyan notes.

A German brand with a 120-year history, Kobo chain is designed to handle abrasive materials such as cement being conveyed via conveyor pans, elevator buckets or reclaimer scraper shovels.

Bloemfontein. As a result, we have already received several orders for our Bauer gearboxes from diamond mining clients in the area," Roberts informs MechChem Africa.

"This is a new approach to the supply in that area for both the mining and agricultural sectors. Mining in the Northern Cape is very strong, with mines and cement plants in and around Kimberley and the Springbok area and all the way across to Black Rock, where manganese is mined. Having a representative that knows the area and the surrounding mines is key to developing the trust-based relationships that we believe in," says Roberts.

With respect to agriculture, Roberts also notes a number of new initiatives to expand the reach of BI's basket of products. "We are developing very strong ties with the South African agricultural equipment manufacturers. In the Reitz area, for example, our chain, sprockets, housings and bearing brands are

now being used in agricultural processing machinery used for potato and onion harvesting and grading," he explains.

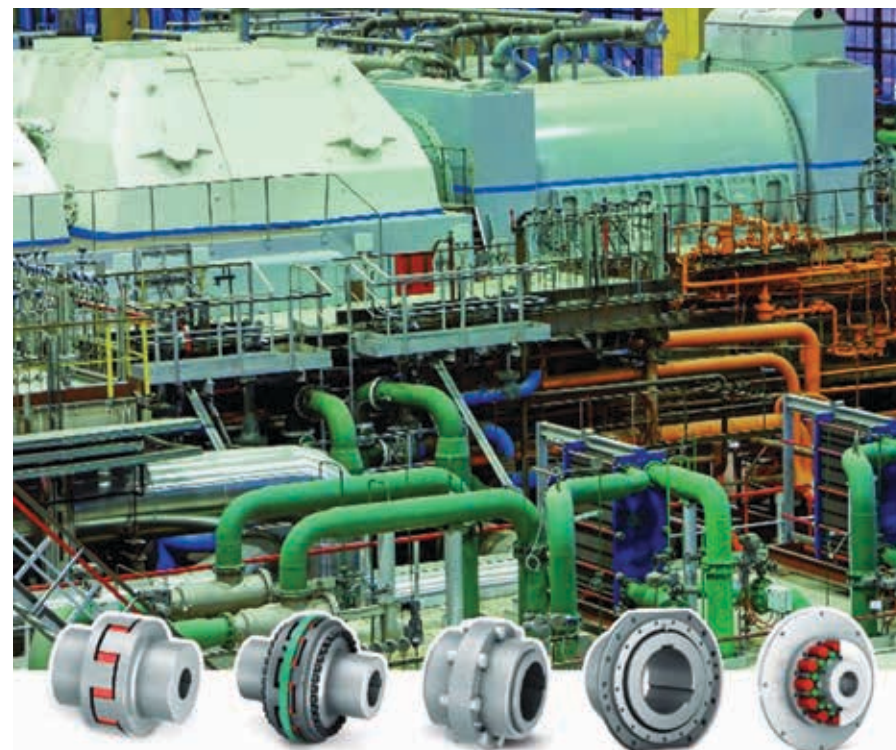
In addition, for the agricultural equipment aftermarket, BI is developing close relationships with the local farming co-operatives. "Like the farmers, we are hoping for an excellent season. Farmers prefer to buy aftermarket spares and equipment from their local co-op because they get a dividend every year based on their spend.

"So instead of competing, we have decided to work as partners with the co-ops. This enables us to directly market our products to individual farmers and, for them, we are able to centralise our support and distribution, while better customising our range to suit the real needs on the ground," he explains.

"And access to our competent staff members is very important," says Roberts. "Over the years, we have learned that you cannot simply supply engineering products as commodities. You have to have knowledgeable people that understand both the product and the applications of their use so that, from the client's perspective, we are seen as having valuable expertise.

"Our sales people have to learn about all of our products and their niche applications: what works and what doesn't in the industry, so that customers are at ease with the competence of our people," says Roberts.

"We are very excited about the ways we are expanding our networks. By partnering with connected people, agricultural OEMs and the farming co-ops, we are able to grow while having centralised points of contact to learn and to pass on our knowledge to those needing support," he concludes. □



BI's recent successes also include a very large Tschan coupling order for the petrochemical industry, which is being used to drive a 6.5 MW machine.



Tschan couplings are ideal for use in drive trains of large mining equipment such as bucket wheel elevators.