

CHRISTENSEN TOOLS


FEATURE



THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB

Jane Bordenave speaks to **John Christensen** about his family business and its dedication to good quality products with a personal touch.





John Christensen, late grandfather of the current director also named John, founded Johannesburg-based Christensen Tools in 1965. The firm provides specialist tools and equipment to companies and professionals working in the production, maintenance and repair of electronic goods. With offices in Cape Town and Durban, as well as Johannesburg, it is able to offer a comprehensive service to its numerous clients throughout the country.

The organisation has a very diverse customer base, covering everyone from independent television repairmen to cell phone network providers. "Our focus is with the professional market, whether that is the actual production and manufacture of new equipment or carrying out repairs, or both," says Christensen. "For example, one of our clients makes satellite decoders, using our tools right from the beginning of production. On the other hand, we have another customer who maintains telephone masts."

What has made the company so popular and has provided its continued success over the past 45 years is its commitment to customer satisfaction. "We pride ourselves in providing quality products to our clients," Christensen explains, enthusiastically. "We do a lot of research, both on the internet and by visiting expositions and tradeshow in Europe, to ensure our customers get the best." Durability is also very important to both Christensen Tools and its clients: "Sometimes I speak to customers who tell me that they bought their toolbox back in 1987 and it is all still in full working order. While we haven't made repeat sales from that particular customer on that particular product, the good name we get from it and word of mouth recommendation is publicity that you just can't buy – good customer relations and a good reputation are invaluable." While tools from the company are undoubtedly more expensive than some that could be picked up in a hardware store, this durability pays for itself. "To explain the value of our goods I give



my team this example – if a Vodacom engineer is fixing a telephone mast and his pliers break, how much will it cost the company in dropped calls and unhappy customers? The reliability of our tools saves our customers money over the long term and is one of our defining features.”

In order to ensure that its customers get the best deal, it is important for the organisation to effectively manage its supply chain. However, supply agreements also have the personal touch that permeates this business. “A lot of our supply contracts were established by my grandfather and represent a handshake between businessmen that has lasted for over 20 years,” says Christensen. “We keep that philosophy now – it is important for us that we know our suppliers as friends as well as business partners. During the World Cup, the managing director of Carl Kammerling International

visited us and while we did speak about business, we also spoke as friends.”

This close relationship with its suppliers allows Christensen Tools to secure orders

despite the comparably small size of this market. “While South Africa is geographically huge, there are only 50 million people living here,” explains Christensen. “On top of that, the general population is not as affluent as in Europe or America, so our market is, in relative terms, really very small. Consequently, as most of our suppliers are either European or American, when

we put in an order that is large in South African terms, it’s seen to be quite small in their eyes. But, as we have an excellent relationship with these companies, we are not side lined despite the size of our request.”

“We pride ourselves in providing quality products to our clients”



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Dedication to its staff is equally important. Christensen himself learnt his trade under the guidance of his father and grandfather and he is eager that his employees receive similar benefits. Personnel are offered various types of training all the way through their career at the company. Those at entry level are offered general basic training and, as they progress up the career ladder, training becomes more specific and focussed on the person's particular role and talents. "We give training to our employees all the way through their time with us in order to empower; there's nothing worse than having people beholden to you to show them how to do things. You have to give them the tools and freedom to do that for them selves, which is a very important thing for us to impart to them." In addition to training, the company offers contributions based health insurance (Medical aid) and pension scheme.

When it comes to corporate and social responsibility, the organisation is very proud of its Broad-Based Black Economic

Empowerment certification. "We have been accredited as a BEE supplier by an accreditation agency and we take pride in the fact that it shows our level of contribution not only to the company but also to the country. It is not just about having black shareholders or black managers, it is about making a positive contribution to the country"

When asked about the future of Christensen Tools, Christensen sees its continued prosperity as more than just good business practice. "45 years ago my grandfather started this business in a double garage in a residential area of Johannesburg. Now we have four offices and many thousand clients. When I drive up to my office in the morning and see our name on the side of the building, that means something to me and it's part of my family. We are providing people with something useful, which will benefit many. Christensen tools is something that I am proud of and so I would like it to grow while still maintaining the values that are the core of our business." **END**

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