



Bosch Rexroth SA steadily implements Africa Strategy

MechChem Africa talks to Tillmann Olsen – regional president for Africa and CEO of the Bosch Rexroth SA Group – about the company's Africa Strategy and the initiatives being put in place to increase the Group's footprint on the continent.

Following the decision to invest directly in the Hytec Group of companies some eight years ago, Bosch Rexroth is well on its way to realising its Africa strategy.

"Bosch Rexroth has been in partnership with the Hytec Group for over 50 years and, back in 2014, this drove our decision to make a direct investment in the company," Olsen tells *MechChem Africa*. At that time, Bosch Rexroth took a 50% stake in the Hytec Group of companies, which was fully consolidated on March 1, 2018 when Bosch Rexroth acquired the remaining 50% of Hytec.

Underpinning the decision was a recognition by the company's German parent that Bosch Rexroth hydraulic and pneumatic products and solutions were under-represented in a growth market like Africa.

"We recognised from the start that the Hytec business model had already enabled penetration into many African countries. Our European model mostly involves the mass production of components, which are then sold into OEM operations. The Hytec business model is an end-user driven busi-

ness: delivering engineered solutions for end-user needs. The partnership has enabled us to retain and grow this model across the continent, using Hytec's expertise on the ground coupled with Bosch Rexroth's unparalleled hydraulic and automation technical expertise and product knowledge to deliver custom solutions to different regions of the continent," Olsen adds.

"We also took the deliberate decision to keep the Hytec business model and expand it across Africa. Hytec had already become strong in Namibia, Botswana, Zambia and Mozambique but, as well strengthening these operations, we have since added Ghana in West Africa, Kenya in the East, and Morocco in North Africa to our Africa network," he says. "We believe that for engineering companies to run operations efficiently, they must be able to put expertise onsite. We strive to put the right skills set in the right place to add value to our customers' operations."

He says that engineering 'heavy lifting' can be done remotely once a problem is fully analysed and understood, but longstanding expertise and an understanding of the op-

erating conditions and the application are essential for implemented solutions to be effective in the long term. "So we strive to create the local expertise to service the mining industry in Ghana; the growing mining, construction and automotive sectors from our base in Casablanca in Morocco; and for the fast moving goods manufacturing industries in Kenya," he says.

In addition, Olsen reveals that local partners have been appointed to take Bosch Rexroth expertise forward in The Democratic Republic of Congo and in Tanzania. "These are not our own legal entities, but we are fully enabling our partners by transferring technological and product knowledge, while fostering good relationships that are mutually beneficial. Africa is massively diverse with respect to culture and this impacts the business landscape. To supply into these markets, one has to have a local presence that can penetrate the cultural barriers," he suggests.

"Fortunately, Hytec was already on this solution path and there was no need to reinvent the wheel. Bosch Rexroth Group ownership adds some gravitas, though, and enables

representatives across Africa to leverage off the bigger footprint and the engineering expertise, from here in South Africa and, if we can't help, from anywhere out of the global Bosch Rexroth network," Olsen informs *MechChem Africa*.

Another important aspect of the strategy is skills and knowledge transfer. "Our own staff and partners are learning their trade and developing the service expertise needed from very experienced colleagues from all over the world. If a technician can't repair a pump, he or she comes down to South Africa for highly practical training from experienced professionals. They can then go back and multiply that knowledge, passing it on to other local colleagues. In this way, the network of skilled professionals in every branch can continue to grow," Olsen explains.

In South Africa, we offer externally approved and Merseta accredited Hydraulics and Pneumatics courses for service providers from all over Africa. In addition, we are able to develop and deliver specific training modules for customers, based on the needs of their local installations," he continues, adding that in these cases, a trainer will travel out to do training on installed equipment with a view to filling skills and knowledge gaps of onsite maintenance personnel.

"Often, when big companies swallow up small to medium sized companies, the corporate mentality dictates how to do things and doing business the 'old way' starts to become complicated. We have deliberately avoided going down that route and, instead, have adopted the Hytec way. For Bosch Rexroth, this is exceptional, but it recognises the excellent value-driven and zero tolerance to corruption culture created by the Hytec Group.

"The approach is also very flexible in terms of the type of services offered and the solutions provided," he notes. "This includes the representation of more than 20 world-renowned brands that the Hytec Group offered before the acquisition and which we continue to sell into the market as components and elements of the integrated solutions we install," Olsen tells *MechChem Africa*.

Praise indeed from an employee with over 20 years of experience of the Bosch Rexroth way.

The end result is a steadily growing African footprint and increasing numbers of skilled people. "In Ghana, we have recently installed a pump and motor test bench and a cylinder stripping and testing bench so we can test strip and repair hydraulic systems and cylinders onsite. And we are replicating these kinds of capabilities wherever we feel there is a need.

"Much of our business is traditional," he continues, "but we are slowly seeing some smart technologies being incorporated into



Bosch Rexroth believes that for engineering companies to run operations efficiently, they must be able to put expertise onsite.



Bosch Rexroth's large cylinder stripping and testing bench at its Hytec Engineering premises in Spartan, South Africa. A similar unit has now been installed in Ghana for local testing, stripping and repair of hydraulic systems and cylinders.

local applications, mostly the incorporation of sensors and some connectivity solutions to help detect problems sooner and to reduce human error.

"For Africa, this involves a two-pronged approach. New products already come with

built in sensors. Getting a reading from the component when it is down a mine, though, doesn't happen overnight. Some sensors cannot easily be retrofitted, so if they are at least installed, then once investment in a network becomes viable, we can easily connect to the component and start taking readings. It's like having the future built in from the start," Olsen says.

"We are customer obsessed. We continually strive to deliver solutions that add value to customer operations, via lower maintenance costs, less downtime or improved productivity. And our strategy is to do this by standing beside our customers wherever in Africa they need us. We move, you win," Olsen concludes. □



Bosch Rexroth modular hydraulic power units are used to drive hydraulic systems across Africa.



In Ghana, Bosch Rexroth recently installed a pump and motor test bench to enable the company to offer similar capabilities to those available in the Rexroth HUBB in Kempton Park, South Africa.