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For people who are serious about mining

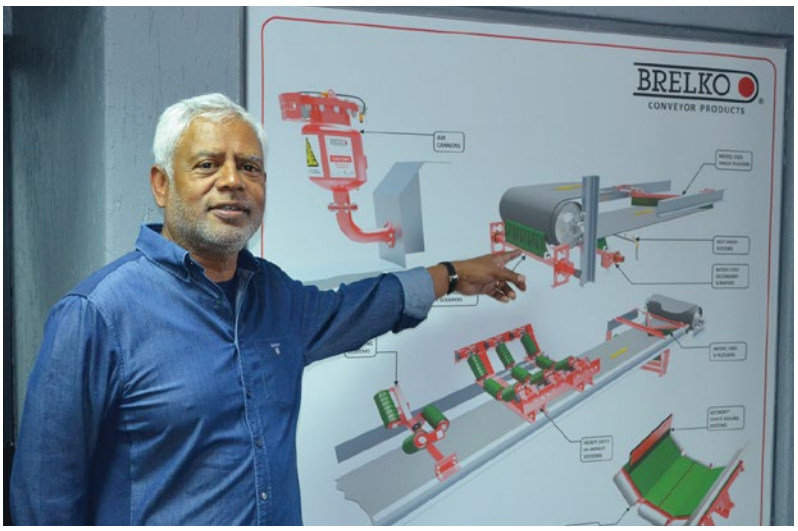


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Brelko celebrates 35 years in business

From being the new kid on the block trying to muscle in on an already well-established segment of the mining business 35 years ago, Brelko is today firmly established as a premium quality supplier of conveyor belt cleaning equipment locally and in the SADC region. Brelko's innovativeness and solutions-driven approach have seen the manufacturer rise to become a supplier of choice to key mining projects which, says Brelko's MD Kenny Padayachee, is an achievement well worth celebrating.



MD Kenny Padayachee pointing to the Brelko product range.

Established in 1987, Brelko has grown from humble beginnings to become a renowned brand. "When we started out 35 years ago, we operated from rented premises in Selby, Johannesburg and in 2009 we were fortunate enough to acquire premises in Booysens, south of Johannesburg. As we grew and expanded the business, we revamped the factory to house cutting edge, custom designed technology, to meet our evolving needs.

Brelko's innovativeness and solutions driven approach have seen the manufacturer rise to become a supplier of choice to key mining projects – Padayachee.

Our staff complement has grown from 27 people to 220 people. And our mantra of continuous product improvement has seen us refine and improve our range to the extent that we currently have numerous international patents, and trademarks in about 90 countries," explains Padayachee.

Early on, the company identified gold and platinum as ideal sectors that, while tough, would be rewarding given that they contain some of the most arduous and challenging materials to handle.

"We realised that to be successful in these markets we had to continuously enhance and improve our product range. In fact, it was during the early 1990s that an engineer at one of the gold operations in the Carletonville area undertook a survey of the four Brelko conveyor belt cleaning items of equipment to test the efficiency of the products in relation to spillage control.

"According to the results of the three-month survey, the efficiency of our products significantly improved the grades achieved by the mine as the products were able to contain the ore within the conveyor belt. Essentially, if the equipment can keep the raw materials on the conveyor belt as opposed to spilling out, you help the client improve productivity and profitability," explains Padayachee.

Below: Brelko's products being assembled ahead of shipment to mines.

Right: Brelko designs, produces, installs and services all its products.







A panoramic view of Brelko's manufacturing facility.

This focus of meeting clients' needs has seen the total transfer point spillage control provider supplying its product range to numerous mining projects, including those of Anglo American, Sasol, Exxaro and Sibanye-Stillwater, and has seen the company expand beyond just gold and platinum.

This was done by following diversified mining houses as they developed projects across various commodities, including iron-ore, coal and new age minerals such as manganese, copper and cobalt.

"Brelko continues to be successful in the SADC region – in the early days we identified new projects as they took shape and supplied our products into these projects. We followed platinum development into the Great Dyke of Zimbabwe; coal and gems into Mozambique; diamonds, uranium and magnesium into Namibia, and De Beers as it developed and progressed its diamond operations in Botswana.

In 2002, Brelko took a leap of faith and entered international markets, focusing on English speaking countries initially and establishing an office in Colorado, in the USA.

A year later, it opened an office in the United Kingdom, allowing it to springboard into European countries, including Greece, France, Belgium and Germany.

This followed with master distributors in Australia, South America (Chile, Argentina and Peru) and the Middle East (Dubai and Saudi Arabia).

More recently, after years courting gold projects in Kazakhstan, the manufacturer has made headway and secured an order valued at R8-million.

South Africa accounts for the lion's share of Brelko's business at 50%, with the rest of Africa and the US-Europe each accounting for 25%.

Research and development

Underpinning the Johannesburg-based company's success is its relentless focus on product innovation and continuous investment in improving processes that drive efficiency and enhance product performance.

Brelko has 48 service teams that service its products on mines across the country.

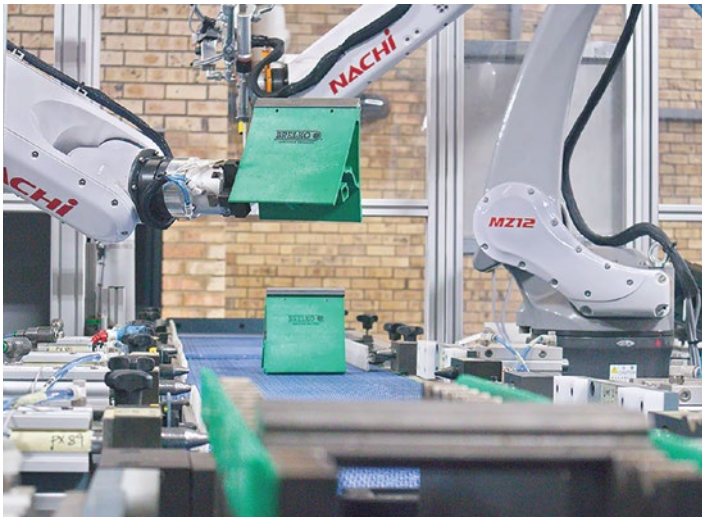
"Brelko's hands-on solutions driven approach requires that we regularly engage our customers, acquiring feedback on the challenges they face in ore transport so we can devise solutions to improve efficiency, and thereby productivity, and ultimately ensure a smooth operational process. In fact, our approach has led to numerous product enhancements which, in turn, have led to us landing an increasing number of contracts," he explains.

Brelko's culture of innovativeness is underpinned by its focus on research and development (R&D), which incorporates weekly R&D meetings where staff thrash out problems and come up with innovative solutions for clients and inhouse improvements.

"It is at one of these R&D meetings, more than

Left: The new robotic gluing and assembly machine improves efficiency, accuracy and production rates.

Below: Brelko's innovative product range helps to improve productivity.







Products being prepared before being sprayed with high-quality paint.

a decade ago, that it was suggested we establish professional service teams for regular onsite inspection at each of the mining operations equipped with Brelko's products. Each team would consist of two qualified specialists who would drive to site daily to monitor and service our equipment and ensure sufficient stockholding for a smooth workflow."

This suggestion was adopted and the move has been a game-changer and a great pay-off.

At Brelko, we take time to carefully unpack the hurdles, looking for the opportunities that may arise – Padayachee.

"For instance," explains Padayachee, "ten years ago, Brelko had product on just six conveyor belts at Anglo Platinum's Mogalakwena mine, but through the dedicated efforts of our service teams, the business has flourished such that by 2018 we had product on more than 210 conveyor belts on site. The same is true for Exxaro's Grootegeluk Coal Mine, where Brelko was initially contracted to provide a few small conveyor belt products – today, Brelko supplies and services more than 186 conveyor belt units at the mine. This is largely thanks to our attentive onsite service teams."

Brelko has 48 service teams that service its products on mines across the country and in the SADC region.

Coupled with this drive for "product perfection" as it looks to be the "Rolls Royce" of conveyor belt cleaning equipment, is the focus on delivering locally manufactured products. This means that Brelko designs, moulds, assembles, packages, distributes and installs its products on mining sites, as well as servicing and maintaining it.

"Our aim is to take local manufacturing to a whole new level and become as self-sufficient as possible. We take absolute pride in the fact that we are a one-stop shop – that we design, produce, install and service all our products," says Padayachee.

Brelko's innovativeness extends to its facility which is increasingly becoming automated.

Apart from expanding the footprint of the facility from 7 500 m^2 to 16 000 m^2 of factory and offices in the past two years, Brelko has injected just over R60-million in factory upgrades, including the acquisition of custom designed equipment.

Its most recent purchase is a R9-million robotic gluing and assembly machine that improves efficiency and accuracy, reduces wastage and significantly improves production rates.

"Like all companies," notes Padayachee, "Brelko experiences challenges, but it is how you view the obstacles and what you do about them that is important. At Brelko, we take time to unpack the hurdles, looking for opportunities that may arise. Take for instance the level five hard lockdowns associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, where sending out our service teams was a challenge. We used this time to progress in-house projects that would otherwise have taken years to complete, such as our spray booth project and new warehouse and dispatch centre."

Brelko's strength lies in its people, who continue to evolve the business – Padayachee.

People power

Brelko's strength lies in its people, who continue to evolve the business. "A case in point is our Friday R&D meetings which are robust, with plenty of ideas for improving the business value chain. Brelko staff are extremely loyal with a large contingent of our employees having worked in the business for decades – in fact, many started off as youngsters straight out of school and rose through the ranks."

According to Padayachee, the company values its relationships with clients and suppliers, going the extra mile to ensure that customers are satisfied and its suppliers are paid timeously, especially its SMME supplier base, which is paid weekly.

Brelko also has strong relationships with engineering and project houses such as DRA Mineral Projects, Sandvik Mining, Tenova, FLSmidth, Hatch and ELB Engineering.

"We actively invest in our people – staff and clients alike – by affording them in-house training and upskilling opportunities. An improved skills-set translates to improved business and customer service," concludes Padayachee. ■

Brelko supplies products into key local and Africa projects

- ❑ Syama Gold project, south Mali
- ❑ The Kamoa Copper Project, Democratic Republic of Congo
- ❑ Karowe Diamond Mine, Botswana
- ❑ Konkola Copper Mines, Zambia
- ❑ Medupi and Kusile power stations
- ❑ Exxaro's Grootegeluk and Belfast coal mines
- ❑ Sappi Saiccor, KwaZulu-Natal