

A century without risk

Indwe – in the business of people

Indwe Risk Services is backed by a 100-year legacy of enduring and trusted relationships, providing tailor-made solutions and treating its clients' needs as its own.

So says chief executive officer Giel Muller, a humble yet dynamic corporate leader.

The merger of Thebe Risk Services and Prestasi Brokers in 2006 gave rise to Indwe Risk Services. While Thebe Insurance originated as Hoskins Insurance Brokers in 1903 and became the insurance arm of the Thebe Investment Corporation, the country's oldest black empowered group, Prestasi Brokers was established in 1972 and became rapidly known for its innovative short-term insurance offerings for individuals and the SMME sector.

Muller played an active role during the merger, and cites it as a major achievement. "The merger saw not only the joining of companies, but also of cultures – one that was truly colonial and one that was truly Afrikaans, becoming South Africa's leading black-controlled Insurance Broker.

"We are now a team of specialists and professionals who all work together in a truly South African company," he says.

A proudly South African story is evident in the coming together of a 'rainbow nation', "Our people embraced each other and as such, Indwe is fused with a uniquely South African spirit that is portrayed in everything we do. The fusion of diverse cultures resulted in great synergy," he says.

Indwe believes in personal relationships and offers face-to-face consultations. While constantly looking for ways to improve individual, corporate and commercial product solutions, the company is committed to providing excellent service to all its clients. Says Muller, "Indwe is the isiXhosa and isiZulu name for South Africa's national bird,



CEO, Giel Muller

the Blue Crane. In amaXhosa and amaZulu tradition, the feathers of the Indwe were awarded to warriors in recognition of their valour. Those who wore the feathers in their headdress would be called upon to stand as the protectors of their communities."

Muller, a humble man by nature, does not enjoy talking about his achievements. "This is difficult to do, as none of my achievements was accomplished on my own. They have been possible via a team of dedicated and inspired individuals," he says.

After graduating as a chartered accountant, Muller joined the insurance industry. He takes pride in the evolution of the sector over the years, and remembers when it was regulated with the aim of transforming it into a professional working environment for young people to ensure an inspiring career path.

A strategist at heart, Muller joined 'the old Prestasi' and watched the business grow. At the time, there were only 18 staff members. "It was an exciting career path, as I was always thinking about what would happen next," he says.

While stressing that he is not a "corporate animal", Muller acknowledges that he has grown and learnt to adjust to the corporate world. "The challenge is to keep the entrepreneurial spirit alive, to have fun and to work toward focused short- and long-term objectives," he adds.

Besides his hectic schedule at Indwe, Muller is a husband and a father of three. "I've been married for 30 years, but it feels like just the other day," he says. His out-of-office passions lie in motorbikes, of which he has four; and a "little bit" of golf and fishing.

On a recent trip to Indwe's Kimberley and Bloemfontein offices, he made use of a motorcycle and backpack, rather than a conventional vehicle. "The time on the road allows for reflection and getting in touch with one's inner self," says Muller. He will have plenty of time for this in June, when he takes to the open road on one of his bikes to tour Africa.

While Muller's family tree dates back to 1765 in South Africa, he firmly believes in the future of this country. "Africa is the place where my spirit belongs. My family played a constructive role in South Africa, with one of my ancestors being one of the three founders of the town Bethlehem and another one of the first mayors of Alberton," says Muller.

Last year proved an exciting year for Indwe Risk Services. Even though most companies were feeling the crunch of the recession, Indwe enjoyed one of its best years in business. It was a year that proved the company's success in the South African economy. "Despite the recession, we enjoyed our lowest staff turnover, highest client retention, best turnaround times with regard to service levels, employed valuable talent and invested in technology. This was all brought on by a strong focus and determination," says Muller.

Appropriate planning was key to this remarkable success, as was seeking out the opportunities that the recession would bring. "None of our staff sat back. Instead, everyone brought ideas or focus to the table."

For the next three years, Indwe will invest in technology to enhance service delivery and enable web sales. The new technology will streamline current and future processes, by making them more agile, faster, better and simpler. This will allow for better service levels, as it will be available to clients 24/7.

Together, Thebe Investment Corporation and Pamodzi Investment Holdings have a majority shareholding in Indwe, enabling transformation and control. One of the company's corporate objectives is to ensure that it achieves equal representation of women and men across all management levels. "To ensure an equitable working environment, Indwe does not tolerate discrimination and supports the growth and advancement of everyone regardless of race, sex, religion, disability, political opinion or ethnic origin," says Muller.

Indwe will launch a new Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) project in this year which will be significant toward its enterprise development. The project entails a new risk management service covering health and safety, and environmental risks. Its enterprise development objectives are achieved through targeted programmes that are aimed at small brokerage concerns that need assistance in various areas of technical expertise.

Muller has been involved in BEE for years. At one stage, he took a short break from the insurance industry and went to farm in the Free State where he also practised as a chartered accountant and bought

three brokerages. In 1992 he was offered a position to assist in the setting up of a black insurance business in Johannesburg. "My holiday was now over and I had to move back to the City of Gold," he laughs. "I still farm, albeit part time."

After his five-year break, Muller was ready to come back to the corporate world, as he needed "action". He played a significant role in setting up one of the first black brokerages in South Africa and securing a life insurance licence in the process.

Since then, Muller has endeavoured to transform the industry. "BEE is not just about a charter or guidelines, but rather a national and business imperative. We are striving to create a society in which each individual has the skills, resources and opportunities to give of his best in building a prosperous South Africa," he says.

The company has embarked upon numerous socio-economic projects countrywide. "We aim to continuously uplift and develop communities," says Muller.

From March, Indwe will be involved in eight Enterprise Development Projects.

As for its successes, Indwe was awarded a certificate by the Minister of Labour for being one of the progressive companies in supporting BEE and developing black skills. "Indwe was one of the 10 companies within South Africa to receive this award," says Muller. The company has also been voted as one of the Best Companies to work for in South Africa, and has been featured within the top 20 companies.

Indwe is best described as an accredited learning provider. "We give our employees the opportunity to obtain their required FAIS accreditation. We have spent considerable amounts on this objective, as well as to provide loans for staff who wish to study further. People are our business, and employee awards are therefore the most significant to us," Muller explains.

Muller lives by the philosophy of John Q. Adams, President of the United States in the 1700s, "Inspire others to dream more, learn more, to do more and become more and you can become a leader".

He says, "A person is inherently what he or she has learnt during their career. That's what life is all about. You can take nothing away with you when you die, but you can leave something behind."