

FAMDRA

A POSITION OF STRENGTH



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Famdra may be a small company, but its industrial weighing equipment is setting new standards for accuracy and cost effectiveness, as Gay Sutton discovers



Products deliver a premium level of performance

Based in Pretoria, South Africa, Famdra is the brain child of director and product designer Naran Naidu. Launched in 1995, the company’s big breakthrough came in 2006 with the development of yet another innovative design concept for belt weighing equipment. “The challenge was to develop a weigher that would fit within most companies’ budgets and yet offer good performance and reliability,” Naidu explains. “When we bench tested the first prototype in 2006 we found that it delivered higher accuracy than expected, and we began to suspect that it could perform to within the NRCS specifications in South Africa [equivalent to the international OIML Standards].” The OIML (International Organization of Legal Metrology) certification system is a global standard of excellence for measuring equipment, and with suppliers that do have belt weighers for trade use, only their top model is certified.

Aware that being able to deliver this premium level of performance in a product designed for cost efficiency could be something very special, Naidu set about refining elements of the design to improve on it, and finally launched the product to market a while later. In 2010, after development of further models, all Famdra’s standard conveyor weighing systems succeeded in achieving the equivalent OIML certification.

The challenge, for a company that had focused very strongly on engineering and design, was how to commercialize the product and break into what was undoubtedly a market with strong brand loyalties. The product range has continued to evolve and grow, and currently includes five conveyor belt weighing systems designed for many product types. Using the weighing technology as the foundation, a further range of complementary materials handling equipment has been developed, including bag filling machines, batching and blending systems, sampling systems, silo and hopper weighing, vehicles and platform scales, in-line check weighers and load out stations.

1995

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Year Famdra was founded

Marketing so far has focused on mining, quarrying, cement manufacturing and processing plants, and

major customers to date include the likes of South Africa’s power company Eskom, Sasol, Exxaro and Afrisam. “Most of our products currently go into the South African market. We still have a very small footprint of around five per cent of the market; but I believe we could increase that to around 30 per cent because of the quality of our product,” Naidu says. “I also want to globalise the product. There are huge opportunities in the rest of Africa and in other destinations around the world.”

Preparing the company for this step change has required a very hard headed look at all-round performance, and the

PRETORIA

Location of Famdra's new premises

implementation of significant internal change. “We began by identifying our strengths and weaknesses: what we were doing well and what we were not,” says Naidu. “Firstly, we do not have strong enough marketing and that is a huge weakness. We identified our product development and ability to design solutions to address clients’ specific issues as our strength. Our manufacturing infrastructure and work disciplines were poor, largely because we had evolved over a number of years and we had not developed a strong formal method. We realised we would need to make significant changes there, if we were to expand the business.” He also believes smaller improvements will be needed across all the administrative disciplines, from accounts through to stock keeping.

As part of the improvement process, the company has just completed a move from its original site in Johannesburg to new premises in Pretoria. “The new site gives us 1,200 square metres of space which is enough to increase capacity as the company grows,” Naidu says. “We are also improving the layout of the site so that it’s logically organised for a production line. My plan, if we succeed in globalising,



The current product range includes five conveyor belt weighing systems

is to retain the design and engineering here in Pretoria so that we maintain our current company size, and to outsource the volume manufacture of our standard product lines to companies that specialise in mass production.”

The move to new premises has, of course, resulted in a change of personnel throughout the manufacturing and administrative levels of the company, and this has presented significant opportunities to instill a more formalised structure for

the manufacturing process and achieve higher quality standards. Currently the new manufacturing and office personnel are being trained in the relevant systems and equipment, and are beginning to take up their responsibilities.

“I have brought in a new administrator, and this will release me to become more deeply involved once again in the product design and to increase our marketing effort by seeing clients and discussing the technical and design aspects of our

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Conveyor weighing system



“WE’RE CURRENTLY FINALISING CONTRACTS TO ESTABLISH OUR FIRST AGENT IN INDIA AND I WANT TO DO THE SAME IN CHINA”

products,” Naidu reveals. A major part of his remit will be to take a firm guiding hand on the company’s forward momentum and begin a wider marketing campaign. “My task will be to go out and establish our global presence by finding suitable agents to represent us in our target markets. We are still a small company and by employing agents, we hope to bridge the gap between

ourselves and the different cultures into which we will be selling.”

Marketing, meanwhile, has not improved as much as Naidu had hoped. Advertising and exhibiting at conferences has made an impact but more needs to be done. Last year, Famdra undertook a custom-designed project for Sasol, which was handled by the global engineering company SNC Lavalin.

Now in the process of being commissioned, it highlighted a marketing opportunity that the company did not previously have the resources to tackle. “There are a number of project houses in South Africa and they are responsible for most of the major projects across Africa. I hope to be able to begin developing much closer relationships with them.”

The company has had significant success within South Africa and beyond. “This includes Jordan in the Middle East, for example, with return orders after the client was impressed with the equipment. In this particular example, the client reported having had many different makes of belt weighers in his plant

Famdra now wants to establish a global presence

over a 27-year period; and the Famdra equipment has outperformed the others. We’re currently finalising contracts to establish our first agent in India and I want to do the same in China.”

As a small company with limited human resources, Famdra will obviously select its partners and target markets very carefully. But with a high quality product priced very competitively, and an expansion strategy to pave the way, it’s just a matter of time before word gets out. **BE**

For more information about Famdra visit:
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