

MINEWARE CONSULTING

MOVING WITH THE TIMES



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Managing director, Paul Saker, discusses how MineWare has grown from a small family enterprise into a preferred supplier in its field of expertise in less than two decades and how it plans to help influence South Africa's mining industry in the years to come

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MineWare software allows the user to track labour heirarchy

As the mining sector in South Africa has evolved, so too have the mechanisms, tools, items of equipment and software needed to service what is a dynamic, complex and challenging industry. It was in the 1980s that MineWare’s managing director, Paul Saker, first identified the fact that this rapidly growing industry required access to much more detailed financial analysis when it comes to fixed and variable cost modelling.

“I remember,” he explains, “one person approaching me back then and saying how one particular problem in mining at the time was that many of the key decision makers had no real idea of what was actually occurring underground in their mines on a day-to-day basis, and that no one was actually addressing this issue at the time. What we have done since is really concentrate on aiding the short term control of our clients mining operations.”

MineWare not only develops customised software, but adapts and redesigns a client’s current products to ensure seamless integration of the system and easy understanding for operators. It is this flexibility that has brought the company success in South Africa’s mining industry.

“We most certainly are not the type of business that sells off-the-shelf systems,” Saker continues. “When we take a product or system into a clients’ mine we go in and bend, modify and customise it to suit that individual

customers’ needs. This is one of the major reasons why clients come back to us time and time again. They know that when they want something changed or modified they need only ask and we will make it happen.”

Another fact that Saker is equally proud to highlight is that in 17 years of doing business, MineWare has not once lost any of the priceless skills that its employees have brought to the table. “My mission, first and foremost, is to ensure that everyone is happy here in what they are doing and that they are rewarded appropriately for their contribution to the company. Time after

time I have seen instances where absolutely critical people have left positions at our competitors resulting in a collapse of unsupported software. Thus, what we pride ourselves on is that those same people who began working on our

critical systems 17 years ago are still here today and are now sharing their expertise with the next generation of employees.”

One of the things MineWare has been able to do by retaining and developing its in-house expertise and knowledge is work towards making continual improvements to not only its own operations, but that of its clients. This is the motivation that gave rise to the recent creation of its electronic business management system (BMS) for its internal process.

“Various pressures in the mining industry across the globe,” Saker says, “coupled with a more demanding workforce, mean that

1996

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The year that MineWare was founded



decision makers now have to have more and more information available at their fingertips. This is especially true when it comes to underground operations where there are often thousands of people going underground every day and where it would literally take months for someone to go around surveying each working area.”

A separate trend that the company has increasingly seen as driving its business forward is the growing importance of health and safety, something that is particularly true of the mining industry in South Africa. “In a good number of the meetings that I attend these days,” Saker states, “the primary concern raised is a clients’ ability to identify unsafe working environments and, having done so, make all of the mines’ users aware of these conditions via the use of emails, SMS messages and so forth. This is something we are able to do programmatically and what that ultimate means is that we are providing to our clients a system that drives their employees, not the other way around.”

Other developments over the last 12-to-18 months in South Africa, particularly the well-publicised illegal strikes that have taken place at various mines across the country, have only served to heighten awareness of the fact that mine owners need, now more than ever, to be

able to control the whole production process much more rigidly.

“The days of making huge profits whether you do things in the right or wrong way are long gone,” Saker says, “and the margins of error are so much smaller now than they were before. It is a simple fact that in today’s market you have to work a hell of a lot harder and smarter, using all of the appropriate tools that you have available. From our perspective, what

this means is that we are seeing a very strong push from decision makers to start quantifying, comparing and auditing all of the information and data that is coming from the mines.”

As a way of properly preparing itself for what the future of the mining sector in South Africa holds, MineWare has made it a priority to ensure that all of its systems are SOX compatible and that all areas of said system are fully auditable. MineWare will also be looking to de-humanise the capture of information where possible, specifically in areas where the use of telemetry is key and in the trackless operations that already exist in the country.

“What we are working to develop,” Saker concludes, “are solutions that will mean that people won’t have to come out of the mine to actually log information. We are currently

MineWare software tracks of the location and number of cars

building partnerships with businesses that are developing rugged tablet computers that will be designed to handle the harsh conditions that underground mines possess. The times are continuing to change and what we want to do is usher in a time where all necessary admin can be done underground. This, we hope, will lead to a scenario where the person responsible for this admin is able to finish his shift and when he sees the light at the top of the shaft, knows that he is now heading home to his family. That is the future we want to help create.” **BE**

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For more information about MineWare visit: www.mineware.co.za



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