



BREAKING NEW GROUND

Saryx Engineering Group co-founder and MD Ingrid Osborne on keeping pace with Industry 4.0 and challenging the status quo.

BY KERRY DIMMER

THREE significant events occurred when the founders of Saryx Engineering Group (SEG), Ingrid Osborne and Julie Mathieson, took their innovative HSEC (health, safety, environment, community) Online product to market – it propelled the business into a 227% growth curve, won the prestigious 2018 FNB

'We call it document sharing. But it's really a disruptive product with a functional value that most products in this space don't provide'

Innovation Awards, and fast-tracked the company into the global arena.

Designed originally for internal use, the web-based HSEC Online software enabled employees to digitally access Saryx's own secure and compliant documentation on-site at clients' premises, eliminating the need for transportation of cumbersome arch-lever files.

So effective was the solution, SEG presented it to the heavy industry sector, where compliance with safety laws and standards was bogged down with paperwork. Using HSEC Online allows such businesses to store and track compliance information and share documentation with unlimited companies, all on a single collaborative platform that does not allow duplication or replication, and which can be customised.

'We call it document sharing. But it's really a disruptive product with a functional value that most products in this space don't provide. It can, for example, be enhanced with advanced data management services and additional optional value-added modules.

'It's not easy to build an SaaS [software as a service] product and sell it successfully,' says Osborne. 'And even though we were able to leverage off our 20-year reputation and strong customer/client relationships, we were thrilled with the uptake.'

Within six months, 1 000 customers joined the HSEC Online community; another 1 500 are anticipated over the next 18 months. 'We knew we had a world-first product; one that sets the bar in terms of safety and compliance, and that could easily be carried into global markets, which is exactly what winning the FNB Innovation award has enabled.'

FNB partners with Endeavor South Africa in supporting high-impact entrepreneurs to achieve growth locally and internationally

through mentorship, access to talent, support systems and funding. Osborne and Mathieson are in the selection process as Endeavor Entrepreneurs at the international selection panel in Buenos Aires, and thus have the opportunity to showcase their products internationally.

'It's really the Willy Wonka of golden tickets, allowing us to present our complete range of integrated industrial automation solutions to the international manufacturing sector but with the focus on HSEC Online as a scalable product,' says Osborne.

Over the past three years, SEG has transformed into a competitive supplier of engineering, ICT, control and automation, database administration and traditional electronic and electrical engineering, which also account for the approach companies are taking to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0) and the internet of things (IoT). 'Cross-integration between products may mean that anyone can select best-of-breed products and string them together seamlessly as we do, but not embracing 4.0 and IoT will leave companies at risk of falling behind,' says Osborne. '4.0 is a revolution, which means change will happen quickly. So it falls to industry leaders to be visionary and adapt.

'At SEG, we are focused on the best way of collecting and representing 4.0 data, ultimately to improve businesses, their revival and empowerment. Small, smart improvements define the landscape of how we do this – things like intuitive maintenance, which leads to equipment longevity and real-time safety and compliance, like HSEC Online.'

Industry 4.0 also means product and technology certifications, and learnerships

remain essential, not least because with change comes entirely new job descriptions, services and diverse business opportunities and talent. The latter concerns the SEG partners because it is hard to come by.

'Talent-diverse companies have proven to be the most successful at what they do, but the lack of diverse talent and the existing gender inequality within the engineering sector means that this combination is not always possible,' according to Osborne. 'Despite great strides made towards gender equality, women engineers remain under-represented in the workplace, and largely because of the lack of female role models.'

Osborne and Mathieson are certainly game-changers in that regard. They were finalists in the 2018 Standard Bank Top Women's Award for Innovation through Technology, and they strive to equip those they mentor with skills to self-monitor perceptions and stereotyping.

'Not all men are created equal either, so we have to remain open-minded if we are to change the status quo,' says Osborne.

With a presence in Richards Bay, Ballito, Cape Town and Johannesburg, SEG is able to service its South African clients and those in 11 other African nations, as well as from its registered office in Maputo, Mozambique. It plans to extend its reach to the US, Australia and South America over the next 12 months.

'We'll also be looking to position HSEC Online as the Wonderbra or Speedo of the document safety and compliance world. Top local and international business leaders are impressed with our competitive advantage of being agile and flexible. This really is only just the beginning for SEG – we will continue to evolve while moving the needle through technology and innovation.' **ADL**