

Serco to capitalise on new technology and innovation in 2017

According to Clinton Holcroft, managing director of South African truck and trailer building company, Serco, the company has achieved year-on-year growth despite tough trading conditions. He says one of the company's high-profile new initiatives this year is a supply partnership with Loadlok based in the Netherlands which will see Serco distribute Loadlok products in South Africa, including a wide range of load securing accessories and multi-temp dividers.



"The local economy continues to experience low growth which is creating a headwind for transporters," said Holcroft. "There are, however, pockets of positive growth in specialised segments. Fortunately, retailers are achieving reasonably stable volumes but overall there are no fireworks.

"The rand has deteriorated by about 15 % against the Euro over the past year resulting in some cost-push pressure on imported components.

"We expect a similar situation next year so we can't rest on our laurels if we want to maintain our leading market position in our specialist vehicle body segment."

Serco's focus is on extracting improvements in efficiencies with the company expanding its facility in Phoenix Industrial Park near Durban earlier this year to accommodate new state-of-the-art machinery for injection panel manufacturing - a first for locally manufactured refrigerated trailers in South Africa.

“Transporters are looking to maximise the use of their vehicle fleets and, with that in mind, Serco manufactured a number of demountable type truck bodies which have already assisted a leading transporter in their business.

“Serco has also worked with leading local retailers to extend the life of older trailers through rebuild and refurbishment programmes, making full use of its national manufacturing and repair facilities in the roll out of the initiatives.”

New technology and innovation

Asked about company performance and challenges in 2016 and prospects for 2017, Holcroft said this year had been an eventful one, highlighting the introduction at Serco of injected polyurethane (PUR) foam panel manufacturing technology. “With this new technology, we have achieved noticeable improvements in thermal performance and panel strength, which reflect our ongoing quest for innovation and our commitment to industry-leading standards of product quality.

“The new Serco Frost Liner trailer is a proudly South African-made product manufactured according to international standards. It is a robust designed trailer capable of coping with South Africa’s demanding operating conditions. The specially coated steel skin is applied to the inner and outer facing of the insulated panels. The outer skin has a durable smooth finish and UV protection for the weather elements while the interior skin incorporates a food safe PVC coating.”

Staying abreast of global trends and innovations is an important part of how Serco strives to give its customers the edge in a competitive African market. With this in mind, a Serco team visited the IAA Commercial Vehicle show in Germany – the world’s leading trade fair for transportation and innovation. The focus of the show themed “Driven by Ideas”, was on forward thinking topics including connectivity, automated driving, alternative powertrains, and digitisation.

Said Holcroft: “Evident were bold new initiatives such as autonomous driving and connected trucks to create convoys for efficient travel on freeways. We also noticed the growing use of lithium-ion batteries for zero emission, among several other concepts designed to improve efficiency and safety, and reduce CO2 emissions.”

Also seen at the show were mobile apps to interface with trailers using telematics to view axle loading, brake performance, and maintenance requirements as well as an increasing use of cameras to monitor the driver - a critical player for logistics success.

“What is clear is that technology is accelerating at an exponential rate and the logistics of the future will be carried out in a highly digital and environmentally conscious way.”

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