

50 years and counting ...

Having known and respected IAN BESWICK for more than three decades, GILL LOUBSER is well placed to track his 50-year printing and packaging industry career.



Marking his 70th birthday, and incidentally the 51st anniversary of the start of his career in the printing and packaging industry, Ian recently shared a celebration with 20 family members on lake Jozini in KZN, hiring a Shayamanzi boat. This was the first of seven Tigers caught (and all returned). Happy with their father's success as a fisherman are sons Gavin, Bruce and Craig.

TWO days after writing his final matric exam paper in 1961, a still-wet-behind-the-ears Ian Beswick applied for a job at Evelyn Haddon & Co in Johannesburg, and was offered a position as an invoice clerk at the grand salary of R30 a month.

'On November 20, 1961, I started what I thought would be a temporary job at Haddons, while I waited to hear if I'd been accepted as an apprentice aero mechanic at South African Airways. I hand-wrote about 70 000 invoices in the first ten months!' he relates.

From those somewhat inauspicious beginnings over half a century ago, Ian has emerged as the man we know today – a highly-respected, hugely-successful businessman, chairman of a significant group of companies, with a sterling reputation throughout South Africa's packaging and printing sector.

In the end, he spent 22 years with Haddons, which became South Africa's largest paper and printing machine supplier (going on to form part of Antalis in 2005). By the time Ian resigned in May 1983, he had climbed the corporate ladder far above his lowly starting point as an invoice clerk to attain the heady heights of machinery director.

Despite this success, however, Ian felt he'd gone as far as he could go in a public company and succumbed to a long-held ambition to run his own business by the time he reached 40.

Today's Beswick group was founded on modest beginnings, first with a small company, Identity & Security Systems, which Ian and his wife Pam managed from a small office in Southdale shopping centre. Later came Beswick Machinery, then Barcodes, WEB Graphics and Laserpac. Along the way, the

original Identity & Security Systems became Beswick Office Products.

WEB Graphics is a separate business that Ian owns in partnership with Peter Persson and Heinz Schweiger (of Norkim Engineering).

Today, the Beswick group of companies employs just on one hundred people operating from six sites including its own custom-built premises (completed in May 1992) in Winchester Hills, south of Johannesburg.

The big breakthrough came in 1991, when Ian gained the Bobst agency for South Africa. At that point he sold Barcodes to the US-based Symbol Technologies (and, as an aside, it was the proceeds from that sale that went into the purchase of a holiday home on Knysna's Leisure Isle, which has been transformed into today's much-acclaimed Knysna Belle guesthouse!).

But back to business, most gratifying for Ian is the fact that his three sons – Bruce, Craig and Gavin – are all involved, plus two daughters-in-law, Mandy and Nicci, and niece Kate. This truly is a family business.

Bruce heads up Beswick Machinery, Craig is MD of Laserpac, and Gavin is joint MD of Beswick Office Products, along with his brother-in-law Andy Wood. 'Between them, they've grown our group of companies way beyond my best expectations,' comments their proud pater.

Bobst leads the way

Being appointed the Bobst agent in 1991 was unquestionably a highlight in Ian's career and a turning point in the fortunes of Beswick Machinery.

PERSONALITY PROFILE

Having previously handled Bobst equipment at Haddons, he knew what an exceptional company it was (and still is) and the undisputed quality of its products. Indeed, Ian often describes the late Paul Enzler of Bobst as one of his greatest influencers.

It's common cause that Bobst group converting equipment – boasting blue-chip trade names such as Bobst, Asitrade, Fischer & Krecke, Schiavi and Rotomec (plus Atlas and Titan, although now separated from Bobst) – counts as a front-runner among corrugated, folding carton and flexible packaging converters throughout the land. Over the last two decades, rarely a month has passed without news of yet another significant installation of Bobst equipment.

Ian believes the local packaging printing and converting sector ably matches global standards. 'Many of our folding carton, corrugated and flexible packaging producers are up with the best in the world,' he confirms. But this happy position, Ian maintains, depends on having the best equipment and staff.

'South Africa can't compete in low-tech labour-intensive production. Packaging converting is high-tech and capital-intensive. To compete, we have to have the best, most efficient equipment; and Bobst leads the way.'

Trust, enjoyment and service

What makes for a sound business such as the Beswick group that has truly stood the test of time?

In Ian's view, the single most important aspect is trust. 'Two-way trust between our team, our customers, suppliers, staff and management is what counts,' he maintains. 'Enjoying what we do and continuously trying to do it better; having the right products and providing reliable service back-up are other success factors. We're blessed with very special people in all our divisions and that's what makes us successful,' he adds.

He also insists that we include a complimentary comment about **PACKAGING & PRINT MEDIA**. 'Your magazine has played a very important role in our success,' he declares.

With the foundations well laid, and a second generation of management firmly in place, Ian has handed over the reins of office, although still closely involved in the business as group chairman. He is, however, now able to devote more time on his favourite pastimes of mountain biking, touring South Africa, and enjoying the fruits of his labours with his wife Pam at the beautifully-appointed Knysna Belle!

Ed's note: We can recommend the Knysna Belle if you're looking for classy accommodation for a holiday in the incomparable Southern Cape. See www.knysnabelle.co.za.

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