

INDUSTRY INTERVIEW

BY MEGGAN MCCARTHY

Africa Print Journal interviews Sonja Groenewald, CEO of Colourtech Printing, about going from an Accounting lecturer to heading a successful printing business that has operated for 26 years.

EARLY LIFE

After graduating from the University of Pretoria with a Bachelor of Commerce in Accounting and a Bachelor of, and later Master's in, Education, Groenewald was employed by the Department of Education and Training as an Accounting lecturer. She was then promoted to Head of the Department of Business Studies at Atteridgeville College. There she played a leading role in the development of the Accounting and Income Tax (NIC/N2 - N6) syllabi according to the then, Outcomes Based Curriculum for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges (TVET) Colleges that was implemented countrywide.

It was during the '90s that Groenewald wanted her published Accounting book printed, but no one was willing to print such a small run. 'I bought an old RISO machine and simply did it myself,' she said. Groenewald then saw the

opportunity to start a printing business that served the publishing and education markets.

Bapsfontein is an unlikely place to start a business — as Groenewald said, 'it's cold and there's nothing to do' — but she saw the potential in an old farm house that also served as a butcher and transformed it into the high-tech, cutting edge facility it is today. 'I established the business to give people hope and opportunity. Money is not important to me, it's how many lives I've changed — that's what drives me.' Colourtech has over 160 full-time employees and their involvement with the business has not only been of great benefit to them, but also to their families. Groenewald's heart for people often extends far beyond her office walls. 'I'm very positive about South Africa, there's so much potential and possibility.'

Colourtech has a unique set-up as in addition to printing, there is also an in-house dispatch and deliveries division, which helps service 350,000 students. Groenewald is a born entrepreneur with a client-centred approach to business and effectively manages her ever growing-businesses, which also include Credobooks, BlueRooster Media and Seyfferdt Publishers. She has a Master's in Education and has authored and published 46 educational titles, all of which have been approved by the Department of Education, and they appear in the national catalogue for the TVET Colleges.

BUSINESS ADVICE

Groenewald believes the printing industry is about building relationships. 'Don't lie to your customers; own up when you've made a mistake and impress them by delivering even better service the next time.' Groenewald's life motto is: 'Faith: it does not make things easy, it makes them possible'.

HOBBIES

'I'm a technology freak, so I love discovering the latest gadgets.'

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Being in the printing industry, you'd think technology would be Colourtech's most important asset, but it's not. 'Our staff are our most valuable resource — we consider each and every one of our employees as part of our family,' said Groenewald. 'I've always told my employees to treat each customer like royalty — whether a client is just popping in for a small pack of business cards, or placing a major order. Good service is crucial.'

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