

The Changing Face Of Valve Manufacturing In South Africa

“Manufacturing in South Africa in the current climate is not for the faint hearted.

Material costs are high – skills at all levels are scarce – labour laws and health and safety regulations are stringent and restrictive – and the volatility of the Rand makes long term planning a challenging exercise” says Mike Sessions, Chief Executive Officer at eDART.

“Many of our local customers from industries such as mining, oil and gas, sugar, pulp and paper are all operating at low levels of production and those that service SOE’s and municipalities face a different set of problems but the end result is similar – smaller order books and lower margins. The sourcing of low-tech products such as valves from the Far East, due to cheaper costs, makes competition extremely fierce, yet despite this, the eDART Slurry Valve Company continues to achieve market growth and expand in this tough climate because we manufacture products of good quality coupled with our proven expertise in providing practical long lasting solutions” said Sessions.

Changing Times

Launched in 2006, eDART Slurry Valve Company is a local valve manufacturing company that has grown to become a significant force in the market employing over 60 people.

The successful strategy behind eDART’s continued growth has been based in designing and producing bespoke specialised valves for a niche market - viz slurry control valves for flotation plants – and getting involved with the process to prove that better level control results in greater productivity for the mineral processing plant.

In the past when new plants were being built the emphasis was on the advantages to the Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM’s) of handing over the manufacture of the valves to a specialist

company resulting in easier installation and reduced commissioning times. Sessions said “As the market has altered in recent years the focus has changed to working more with end user mines and to initiating the idea of improved performance of existing plants through use of better level control valves.”

The key to the company’s success has been the merging of various skills within the management team towards this common objective. Traditionally most valve companies have generally just supplied products to their customers – selecting the most appropriate type of valve for the application. Control valve companies usually go further by selecting the most suitable sizes of valves as well.

The eDART Team

“The knowledge eDART has acquired of our customers’ processes enables us to offer holistic solutions rather than just the valves. When this knowledge is combined with the ability to design and develop innovative engineered products then a winning formula is the result. Our Projects Department comprises four Project Engineers with extensive process engineering and instrumentation knowledge. Our Design department is manned by three design engineers plus a Computerised Fluid Dynamics (CFD) specialist engineer” added Sessions.

Sessions continued “Technical Director Richard Rule heads up the company’s Project Division. His instrumentation background and process knowledge enables the company to offer clients advice on plant design to enable the control valves to perform under optimum conditions.”

The Design and Engineering Department, run by Oliver Sessions, is constantly adding new valves to the company’s range ensuring that the designs follow a modular pattern so that spares are easily identifiable for future maintainability.

New Products

New products are the life blood of the company. A range of poppet

samplers were first to be added to the valves – coming from the need to measure in order to control. The company now offers sampling systems to suit a variety of applications. A unique solution to the control of two valves working in parallel to each other resulted in a Dual Valve Controller where a single signal is intelligently split into two separate signals for optimum control.

More recently the company has built on its established reputation as a slurry control valve company by adding in other on-off and manual slurry valves to its offering – the C-Tech knife gate valves and Red Roc pinch valves.

Advantages for Project Houses

Ten years on, eDART now consists of a group of companies making these different valves and actuators, and a sales and marketing company called Afrivalve which offers a wide range of valves to complement the in-house manufactured valves. Sessions said “This capability is advantageous when working with project houses because it enables us to provide more than just slurry valves, it enables us to provide a complete valve solution.”

“The future is uncertain and there is no room for complacency in the market place. The companies that succeed will be those who are able to adapt to the new conditions. The ability to adapt, adjust and innovate is at the core of the eDART ethos” concluded Sessions.