



Season's Find co-founder Lance Luiters at the clothing factory

# CLOTHES MAKETH THE (BUSINESS)MAN

The local clothing manufacturing industry has taken several knocks due to cheap imports, but perseverance and the right attitude have seen a small Cape Town-based business, Season's Find, grow into an international supplier

Lance Luiters and his wife, Georgina, started their promotional clothing business in their garage in 1998, with R2 750 in capital. Some 18 years later, Season's Find produces over one million clothing items per year and employs nearly 200 Capetonians – and it has just landed its first international contract.

Their company initially provided promotional clothing to a number of large companies. In 2006, they took the leap into fashion, offering cut, make and trim services to suppliers who were providing clothing to local retailers. In 2007, to make ends meet, the couple merged the promotional and fashion elements and moved the business back to their home. A year later, demand for their clothing increased enough for them to scale the business back up.

“We took out a second bond to give us the opportunity to buy more machinery so that we could be more productive,” says Luiters. The company moved into premises in Woodstock and increased its staff complement to 35. “It wasn't the first time that we were responsible for the well-being of staff, but it was more daunting this time in that we were solely responsible for them. The second bond gave us a cash flow breather,” he says.

Keen to increase the business's visibility, Luiters began targeting retailers directly. In 2010, when Woolworths was looking for a local supplier to assist with the manufacturing of World Cup-branded clothing, he took the initiative and wowed them with his perseverance, quality of work and quick turnaround time. He won the

## DID YOU KNOW?

The textile and clothing production sector is SA's second-largest source of tax revenue, employing more than 80 000 people and contributing about 8% of the GDP.



Buyer Tevin Luiters, accountant Wade White and merchandiser Kaylyn Anderson with Lance Luiters

## DEVELOP YOUR ENTERPRISE

- Pick n Pay's Enterprise & Supplier Development programme is run in the form of a competition called #PnPBoostYourBiz. Entrepreneurs who meet the competition's criteria stand a chance of winning a total business package, which includes retail listings, business support and mentorship towards becoming an accredited service provider to Pick n Pay.
- Total SA's Siyakhula programme seeks to upskill, train and facilitate funding for five new entrepreneurs who wish to operate retail service stations in its network. The approved individuals will undergo a three-year mentorship support programme to assist them in establishing and growing the stations into viable business ventures.
- Massmart's Supplier Development Fund aims to assist South African small, micro- and medium-sized businesses which are either existing or potential suppliers to the retail giant. The fund targets established local manufacturers, producers and significant assemblers of products that can be resold in the Massmart retail divisions, assisting suppliers in enhancing the quality of their products or improving their production capacity.

efficiency improvements. "Woolworths currently has 41 enterprise development beneficiaries in its programmes," says Barron. "Our teams regularly visit the factories and – particularly during the initial stages – we spend a lot of time guiding the supplier and advising on best practice."

An investment in new infrastructure and production systems saw Season's Find double turnover and employ 179 local workers – many

of them women. All of the garments are produced in Cape Town, with trimmings and fabrics manufactured locally and in Swaziland.

Season's Find will be taking its "proudly southern African" philosophy to the world in 2016, having been offered the chance to produce clothing for Woolworths-owned David Jones in Australia. "Of all my dreams for our business, I never expected to be exporting our locally-made products and competing in the international clothing world," says Luiters. "It gives me a huge sense of pride and satisfaction and it's a great opportunity to increase our volumes and productivity."

Luiters' wife passed away in 2015, but rather than be discouraged, it has spurred him to greater heights. Season's Find remains very much a family business. "I would never have invited my son and daughters to come aboard if I didn't believe in the power of a family business," he says.

Luiters is optimistic about the future of the local textile industry, which has the support of the government. It is SA's second-largest source of tax revenue, employing more than 80 000 people and contributing about 8% of the GDP.

The Department of Trade & Industry has introduced a programme aimed at improving the global competitiveness of the sector through a range of structured interventions covering all aspects of business operations. "We are still reliant on the strength of the rand," says Luiters. "Although the current outlook for the country's economy is bleak, the clothing industry has the support of the government and the opportunity to export products to ensure its survival." **DM**

business, doubled his staff complement and supplied over 75 000 units of clothing in the space of two months. "Thanks to our experience in the promotional clothing industry, which is very deadline-driven, we learnt the importance of quick turnaround times, which has become a hallmark of our business," says Luiters.

Impressed with Season's Find's work, Woolworths invited the company to become an official supplier and placed an order for the Autumn/Winter 2011 season. "We had to do some re-tooling and restructuring, which required a financial investment, but we had a commitment from Woolworths, so it was an easy decision to make," he says.

"Season's Find's story is a bit of a fairy tale, as our first contact with Luiters happened purely by chance," says Phillip Barron, Woolworths Clothing Technical Manager. "Going from producing 10 000 units to more than one million units per year in the space of five years is a really good story. Luiters' hard work and dedication, more than anything else, drove his success. Against a backdrop of rapid decline in clothing manufacturing over the years, Season's Find's success is wonderful for our industry."

In 2015, Woolworths accepted an application from Season's Find to join its Enterprise Development programme. The resulting loan, to the tune of R1,9 million, came with expert support in all facets of the business. As part of the programme, Woolworths provides continuous support to new suppliers in the areas of quality management, sustainability guidance and