

Steering SRSA over rough terrain

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Lubin Ozoux recently completed his first year as CEO of Sumitomo Rubber South Africa (SRSA), manufacturer of the Dunlop, Sumitomo and Falken tyre brands. He took up the position during the height of South Africa's second wave, facing and conquering some interesting occupational trials.



With any change in leadership, an organisation must adapt. Fortunately for Ozoux, he was already part of SRSA as the Group director for Sales, Marketing and Operations and a key member of the Executive Committee, contributing to the overall strategic direction of the company.

Ozoux joined SRSA five years ago as the director of Exports in Africa and successfully led the expansion into key African markets, later taking overall responsibility for the company's sales throughout Africa including South Africa.

"I brought in my own leadership style and consider the buy-in I received from everyone – from the senior team through the ranks – to be one of the most important contributors to our performance," said Ozoux. "Our people are empowered to play their parts in driving the company forward, which is also proving to be the winning formula for conquering the challenges and turning them into opportunities."

"Last year was a real stop start year. The challenge in business is a bit like sport and you have to create the momentum, then ride it well. Unfortunately, supply was hampered by the various lockdown restrictions and the July riots and looting in KZN later made it even more difficult to build the necessary momentum for success, but we laid a solid foundation for future sustainability," he said. □ "When you are people focused and have an encouraging leadership style, you need both a very clear vision for the future and a plan on how to do it if you don't want to be a micro-manager. People need to know exactly where the company is going. I think we have done well in terms of creating clarity on our vision and what needs to be done by the various teams to get there."

"We have developed processes and tools that give our people a solid understanding of how they need to contribute. They are now able to see how they can help us get through the difficult times and appreciate the personal growth and development that come with rising to the challenges.

"We give honest constructive feedback to our employees, and while this is tough, it encourages them by showing that they are valued. This approach across the business has helped us move as a team towards our core vision of creating

sustainability,” Ozoux explained.

He said the company’s short-term goal was to ensure sustainability for its 1,500 employees and their families, by navigating carefully through the hard times. Longer term, it’s about proving that South Africa can house a solid manufacturing sector and ensuring the country’s prosperity.

“Besides making use of government incentives to create much needed jobs, manufacturers need to be sustainable and successful in exporting to attract foreign investment in order to grow. We are focused on our vision of innovation, sales and customer service and on disrupting the current tyre industry by bringing real value. Our customers must feel like partners in building a better future for all stakeholders,” said Ozoux.

Re-starting, re-focusing, creating momentum and steering the troops in the right direction were important drivers during his first year. The broader industry was changing and he saw bringing value to dealers and end users as key to its success.

Among initiatives introduced by SRSA over the last year was the launch of Dunlop Sure – South Africa’s only free tyre insurance with full replacement for irreparable damage caused by all road hazards, which was relevant and much welcomed by the South African consumer. “We are committed to our customers and want to give them peace of mind at a time when many can’t afford to change their tyres every six months,” he said.

Ozoux sees a bright future for SRSA as car manufacturers move ahead with their plans to produce models that reduce carbon emissions. “As a tyre manufacturer, we are part of these plans and grateful for the many opportunities to partner.”

Currently SRSA has OE agreements with Toyota, Nissan, Isuzu, Ford, TATA, UD Trucks, Scania, MAN, Iveco and VWSA, meaning that tyres produced by SRSA are fitted to new vehicles on the assembly lines of these international brands. “Every year we are growing our OE footprint through solid partnerships with major passenger vehicle, 4X4 and more recently truck manufacturers, which demonstrates credibility and trust in local tyre products,” Ozoux concluded.

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Sumitomo Dunlop



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