



Craig Uren,
Chief Operating Officer, Isuzu
Trucks South Africa

With a B.Comm degree from the University of Port Elizabeth, Uren started his motor industry career in 1990 in the company's Graduate Training Programme. After holding various positions in sales and marketing he was appointed as Fleet Sales Manager in 1996 and promoted to National Truck and Fleet Manager in 1999. In June 2005 he assumed the role of Isuzu Truck Manager - Truck Sales and Marketing before taking on his new position at Isuzu Truck South Africa.

Isuzu Trucks

with you for the long run

According to Craig Uren, Chief Operating Officer of Isuzu Trucks SA, actions speak louder than words

When it comes to the driving force behind one of South Africa's most successful commercial vehicle companies, Craig Uren, Chief Operating Officer of Isuzu Trucks SA sheds light on what makes the brand one of the biggest players in the industry.

WHAT'S THE STORY BEHIND ISUZU TRUCKS IN SOUTH AFRICA?

Isuzu Trucks started trading in 2007 after Isuzu products were being sold by General Motors dealers in South Africa. We set up a completely new culture and a set of standards for a local joint venture company - Isuzu Truck South Africa (Pty) Ltd - in a 50:50 partnership with General Motors South Africa. Now we're consolidating all we have learnt and achieved and competing on the level of industry leaders.

Isuzu trucks are assembled in South Africa at the GM factory in Port Elizabeth through a contract agreement with GM to run production for us. This is a good way of managing our business to ensure that we stay focused on sales, distribution and customer care. We produce everything from 2-ton to 45-ton trucks across 50 models. We've got a truck for every application - the key differentiator being the acceptance of Automated Manual Transmission (AMT) in the market adding to the success of our brand.

Isuzu Trucks has grown in sales volume and market share every year



except 2011 when the tsunami devastated Japanese supply chains and restricted our operations. We aim to grow volumes between 10% and 15% per year. The trend shows we've grown from 8,4% in 2007 to 11,4% at the end of 2012. Our market share is considerable despite our product portfolio only covering 50% of the market, primarily the medium segment.

Isuzu Trucks are distributed through most of the existing General Motors South Africa truck dealers. However, in conforming to Isuzu Truck requirements for customer service and market growth,

THE CURRENT ISUZU TRUCK NATIONAL DEALER NETWORK IS REPORTEDLY UNDERGOING A R350 MILLION UPGRADE. WHAT DOES THIS ENTAIL?

We initially started the upgrades within the first two years of our business concentrating specifically on converting GM car dealers to truck dealers. As dealers have grown in volume, we've had a steady stream of GM dealers moving from shared car and truck facilities to dedicated Isuzu Trucks facilities;

some of these changing to bigger dedicated facilities. The dealers have done a great job in creating a footprint for the brand. We've got seven dealers at the moment and will be building all-new dedicated truck facilities. It's an ongoing process driven by success in the dealer environment and in the segment. We are also adding strategically placed servicing points in high customer density areas

Currently we have five export dealers, 35 full franchise dealers and 15 service dealers. We don't want to flood the market with dealers; they have to be viable and sustainable. However, we need to ensure that customers don't wait for a truck service, so it's a balancing act. We have to ensure our dealers meet the requirements of Isuzu Trucks in catering to customers' needs in the long run.

WHAT HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESS OF ISUZU TRUCKS IN THE COUNTRY?

Our success has come through creating new markets and offering the best customer service we possibly



can. Success is in what you do, not in what you say. We live in an environment of diminishing standards, so maintaining standards is a challenge in itself. But if you can continuously improve, you can distinguish yourself from the competition.

We strive to give truck operators the best returns from their asset, from cost per km to residual value and fuel consumption. There is only one question to ask. Is your customer happy? If the answer is no, you have a lot of work to do. If the answer is yes, carry on doing what you're doing, only better.



WHAT IS AMT AND HOW DOES IT WORK IN PRACTISE?

Automated Manual Transmission is not an automatic. It uses the existing manual transmission and electrically shifts the gears for the driver, although the manual shift option is still available. It makes an average driver quite proficient and removes the risk of driver abuse. So it's the best of both worlds. AMT is almost a risk management department sitting in the transmission. Thanks to a computer that controls the rev range, the vehicle is able to perform at optimum fuel efficiency making it ideal for inner city operations.

Customers that have standardised their entire fleets with AMT have saved 30% on operating costs.

WHAT MEASURES HAS ISUZU TRUCKS TAKEN TO ENSURE QUALITY OF AFTER-SALES SERVICE?

The dealers are primarily and fundamentally geared to get customers on the road and to make sure they stay on the road. We have evolved our own level of communication technology so we can communicate with the relevant people in real time. Customers want decisions, and we have the system in place to empower our staff to make decisions and help the customer get moving.

HOW DOES ISUZU TRUCKS LIVE UP TO ITS SLOGAN: "FOR THE LONG RUN"?

Two of our most vocal top 10 customers admit, 'Isuzus don't break down'. Talk is cheap, but our warranty and cost of operation figures do exceptionally well in comparison to industry benchmarks.

We try hard to balance the technology in our trucks with reliability to ensure unnecessary technology doesn't cost unnecessary down time.

Another distinguishing factor is the residual value of our trucks. We rarely get a used Isuzu trade in and these seldom go into the open market. Customers generally hold onto their Isuzu trucks for a long time. When they do eventually sell, there's always someone who's prepared to pay top dollar for the truck because they value its worth. Average ownership of an Isuzu truck in our market over 20 years is only 1,55 owners per truck lifespan compared to other brands' two owners per truck lifespan.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM ISUZU TRUCKS SA IN FUTURE?

Our intention is to continue to be an industry leader in the truck market by continually expanding and exploring opportunities. Our business strategy doesn't need to change; we just need to keep building on our core principles by using our infrastructure and product portfolio in a customer-centric approach - continuously adding value to customers' businesses. We will look at introducing AMT to other segments of the market, below the current 8-ton trucks, to smaller trucks towards the end of the year. People can expect exciting launches at the Johannesburg International Motor Show later this year. We're a proud company, we don't follow convention and predetermined rules, and we're determined to provide the customer with the best value. 🚛