

Digga CEO proves construction is no 'man's world'



By JAYNE MUNDAY | March 18, 2010

Queensland's construction industry is no longer associated with the beer-wielding, stabbies wearing, all male stereotype it once was.

As proved by [Digga](#) CEO and Managing Director Suzie Wright, female management is increasingly becoming the norm as the sector moves to bolster its professional image and secure big business.

Established in 1981 by Stewart Wright, Digga Australia is a home-grown Queensland company recognised for its innovative approach to leading edge design and manufacturing quality.

As Australia's largest manufacturer and exporter of gearboxes and attachments for the earthmoving machinery industry, Digga has grown over the years to become a leader in its field.

Headquartered in Brisbane, Digga has two additional company-owned Australian manufacturing plants in Sydney and Melbourne.

It also has facilities in the United Kingdom and master distributors in New Zealand & Western Australia to service its extensive dealer network.

GROWTH

Originally, Digga had a more narrow approach to business, specialising in gear boxes, augers & wearparts for machinery.

Suzie Wright – who was appointed CEO six years ago – explains how working closely with end users allowed the business to branch out and develop new

and improved products.

"We now specialise in things such as trenchers, brooms, buckets and rakes, which are basically accessories for the machines," she says.

"We have 35 lines of attachments, but this includes hundreds of variations."

Digga has transformed the industry by taking a host machine (excavator, bobcat) and making it a multi-purpose one.

"Our products allow for quick attachment using hydraulic lines, effectively turning one machine into a highly-profitable multi application system," she says.

Digga also pioneered pendulum drilling in Australia.

"An excavator can pick up a borer and do 60 percent of what big rigs can do at a fraction of the price," Wright says of the company's cost-efficient breakthrough.

Working through a dealer network, Digga sells its products through industry heavyweights such as Hitachi, New Holland and Toyota.

In addition to having a strong customer base within Australia, it exports as far as South Africa, the United States and Russia.

Due to its strong relationship with the United States, the business is now looking at opening a branch in Iowa in the second half of 2010.

"Iowa is a good manufacturing area ... we have sold there for over 12 years," Wright says of the significant expansion plans.

MANUFACTURING

In February 2009, Digga acquired fellow Queensland-based company Kanga Loaders and in October 2009 launched Digga North America and Digga Service in Australia.

The purchase of Kanga really allowed the company to ramp up its manufacturing, according to Wright.

"While Kanga is a separate business, Digga now manufacture the loader brand and it is now featured in our product line," she says.

"It has allowed us to really grow our manufacturing capacity at Yatala, where we process all our equipment from raw material."

Situated on eight acres of prime commercial property, the 12,500-square-

metre manufacturing facility is located halfway between Brisbane and the Gold Coast.

Following phenomenal growth in demand and manufacturing ability, the company plans to construct a new building in the next 18 months.

THE SUNSHINE STATE

Wright's enthusiasm for the business is clearly evident from her dedication to customer satisfaction and forward-thinking originality.

"I was born into a construction family and often worked with my dad on job sites," she says of her blue-collar background.

With occupations ranging from rigger to stage design & restaurant work, Wright finally found herself at Digga (founded Stewart Wright) and worked her way up to CEO and Managing Director.

Queensland is the perfect location to establish a business and see it thrive, according to Wright.

"It is the fastest growing state and has significant housing and infrastructure," she says.

Queensland's strong transport infrastructure has also helped sustain growth within Digga.

"The shipping port of Brisbane is great ... we export and import & being close to a major port is good for business," she says.

STAYING AHEAD OF THE MARKET

In order to keep ahead of the pack, Digga has vigilantly tracked market trends and prioritised customer satisfaction.

"We are a unique business in the way we [management] have a close relationship with senior staff," Wright explains.

"This attitude flows onto industry ... we want to make a product that provides customers with versatility & extra profits."

Digga and has a strong commitment to research and development (R&D).

"We are very innovative with our R&D. Even when the GFC hit, we actually grew the R&D division," Wright says.

Resourceful engineering is a key part of the Digga philosophy, with 20 percent of business being custom built.

"We have looked at what industry needed and moved with the market," Wright says.

"We also invest a high percentage of profits back into the business which keeps us strong."

Forging ahead with expansion plans while many other businesses were scaling down or closing shop saw Digga win various awards last year.

In addition to being ranked 65 in QBR's 2009 Queensland 400 – a listing of the state's top privately owned companies – it won the '2009 Gold Coast Business of the Year' for the second time in six years.

This accolade comes after being crowned with both the '2009 Australian International Design Award' and the '2009 British Export Excellence Award'.

In the same year, Digga's I-Drive (hydraulic drive system) won an Australian International Design Award for the heavy machinery category.

EXPERT ADVICE

If any stereotypes still remain in the construction industry, pulling the company through the GFC and spearheading business growth overseas proves Wright has shaken off any bias.

"There are a lot more women coming into senior positions within this industry," she explains.

"In the past it has been very 'blokey', where deals were done with a beer in hand. But things have now modernised and the industry has had to get more professional to keep pace with the market.

"The toughest thing is trying to remain a woman in a man's world, and this is where I think many women go wrong."

Breaking the mould of conventional female occupations and steering a thriving international business, Wright offers a number of tips for Queensland business owners.

- "Invest in your people and surround yourself with good people."
- "Develop good, strong supply relationships. We managed to retain excellent supply chains during the GFC."
- Smoke and mirrors: it's all about perceptions. "People need to know and trust you. Have confidence."
- "If it sounds too good to be true it probably is; there is no easy buck. It's all about having good, strong business skills and ethics."
- "Live, love, work and play. Trust your gut instinct and go with it."