

# Wired for customer care

Acquiring, keeping and nurturing a solid client base is a challenge for any small business. **Wendy Maritz** spoke to Sello Moloantoa, head of Phuzamanzi Electrical, about the growth of his company and the importance of evolving your customer-care strategies.

**P**huzamanzi Electrical has one of those SME success stories that reads like a fairy tale, its growth and success seemingly a result of the Midas touch of an entrepreneur who saw a gap and followed his dream. But the real story, the company's founder and managing member Sello Moloantoa would say, has much more to do with the combination of technical expertise, service excellence, reviewing and refining product offerings and the implementation of successful customer-care strategies.

Phuzamanzi started out as a one-man, sideline company called Silhouette Electrical in the late '90s. However, it took more than a decade before Moloantoa was able to devote himself full-time to his business, which he had renamed Phuzamanzi Electrical in the interim. And as it turned out, he had his then employer Eskom to thank for helping him to take the plunge. At the time, he was working as the technical services manager at the former Eskom Convention Centre (known today as the Eskom Academy of Learning).

'Some of the departments were being earmarked for outsourcing and Eskom had initiated a project to prepare some of us for starting our own businesses by sending us on training,' explains Moloantoa. The outsourcing didn't quite go according to plan, but by then he had

been bitten by the entrepreneurial bug and, as he puts it, he 'jumped ship'. It was May 2009; Moloantoa had 22 years' worth of electrical experience behind him and a deep desire to finally get the fledgling company he had been holding on to for so long off the ground.

relationships because my company was new in the market. Secondly, I offered quality professional services and products at a discounted rate. And there was (and still is) a guarantee on all the work we do.'

This start-up strategy was very effective, and within three months of Moloantoa's

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Moloantoa set about establishing a core business that focused on his field of expertise, which included industrial electrical installations, repairs and maintenance, as well as developing a sound work and client-services ethic as the base for all his dealings. 'Building a customer base was challenging – and still is,' he admits. 'Nothing is guaranteed, even if you are officially registered as a supplier on a client's database.'

'Clients are normally wary of dealing with an unknown entity. In the beginning there is no differentiation between the owner of a company and the company, so first of all, I ensured I made personal

resignation, he got his first contract with the Landbank of SA to refurbish their regional offices in various provinces. Not long after that, Phuzamanzi was servicing SARS, doing facilities repairs and maintenance. The company's client base has since expanded to include Old Mutual Properties, the City of Johannesburg, the Scibono Discovery Centre, the EDCON Group and former employer Eskom.

Moloantoa's philosophy of offering quality service and building personal relationships had paid off. If he had any lingering doubts about starting his own company, they were dispelled at the end of 2009, when he entered



**Moloantsoa in a moment**

Born 16 November 1967  
in Ga-Molapo, Limpopo  
Company: Phuzamanzi Electrical  
Launched: May 2009  
Contact:  
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bigger operations needed financing and with its good track record the company was able to secure credit lines with suppliers. His staff complement was also growing and by 2011 he had employed 32 people. He was able to purchase trucks and the equipment he needed to develop and deal with the projects at hand. Phuzamanzi was well and truly on the road, but Moloantsoa is not a man who easily rests on his laurels. Offering clients a service that your competitors aren't makes good business sense. It sets you apart from the field and raises your game.

Moloantsoa saw there was a niche market for the tracing and repairing of cable faults and purchased state-of-the-art cable-testing equipment. 'The equipment include the Megger fault detector, cable-route tracing machine, cable spiking gun and cable fault pinpointer. These machines ensure that minimum time is taken in locating and fixing cable faults for clients.'

Moloantsoa's broader vision for expansion reached fruition this year when he saw geographical gaps in the market, and opened branches in Middelburg and Cape

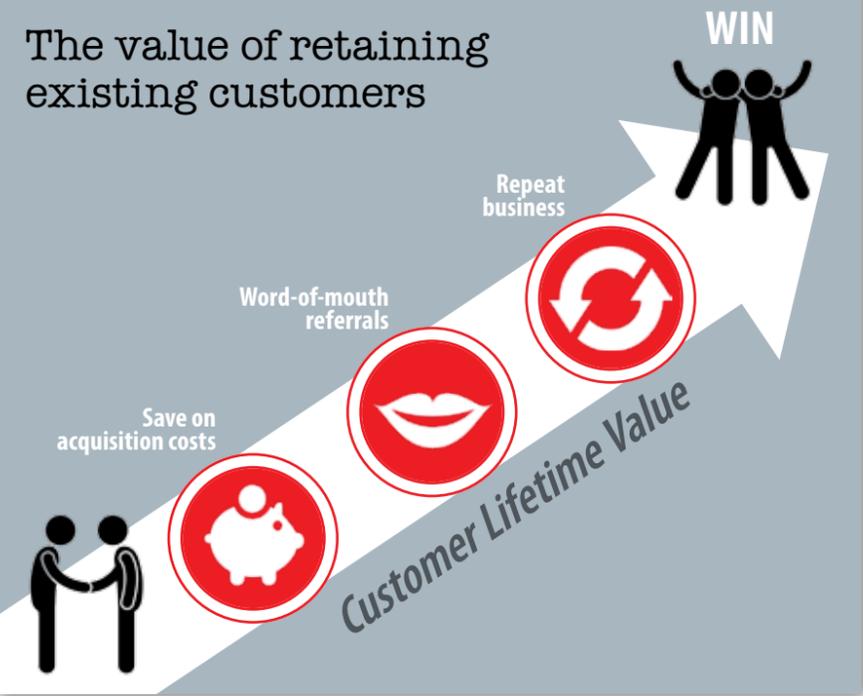
Town. 'Mpumalanga is growing at a rapid pace, mainly due to the mining sector and the refurbishment and building of power stations. Middelburg is right in the middle of this economic hub,' he explains. And Cape Town? 'I suppose this is what risk-taking is all about,' Moloantsoa admits. 'The decision was strategic and I pin my hopes on benefits in the near future.' Two provincial managers have been appointed and contracts are already in place for both the new branches.

Since Phuzamanzi's inception, Moloantsoa has never stopped learning. While intuition, good timing and technical know-how paved the way to early success, the company's product offerings and customer-service strategies are always evolving. At the root is respect for your customers 'in all spheres of the business'. It involves getting to know them, listening to what they want, and fixing problems quickly when they are dissatisfied.

One of the most valuable lessons Moloantsoa learnt about customer feedback was during his appearance on *The Big Small Business Show* on Summit TV earlier this year. 'I realised we needed to improve on our systems. Our surveys need to include how our clients feel about the training and skills profile of our employees, not just their technical skills, but those "softer" people skills.'

This is something, Moloantsoa believes, comes from the top down. 'It's important that your staff understand the vision and mission of your company. Homogeneity should run through the veins of your

**The value of retaining existing customers**



company.' It's also important to actively allow customers to get to know you as a company. Package yourself in such a way as to be visible to the community you serve.

At the end of 2011, Phuzamanzi outsourced a marketing specialist to advise on a new-business strategy. The overhaul included the relaunching of the company's website, the branding of vehicles, the introduction of courtesy visits to clients, and cold-call strategies to potential new customers.

'We also started celebrating even small achievements with press releases on our website. It's good to remain current and to show continuity,' Moloantsoa explains. 'We live in a rapidly changing business arena,'

he adds. 'Customers are more empowered than ever... It's up to the entrepreneur to change with the times, or lose the business... Competition is a reality, as more and more companies spring up in and around South Africa, and to survive, you need to understand your customer's requirements, and exceed them.'

Sello Moloantsoa has been, as he puts it, 'wired up' all his life. Even he might be surprised that his gut feeling for business would take him from fixing fridges and stoves as a youngster to being nominated for an Oliver Empowerment Award in the SME Category earlier this year. But then again, judging from his unswerving entrepreneurial spirit, maybe not. ■

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Phuzamanzi in the national Enablis Small Business Launchpad Awards.

With competition from 7 000 other budding entrepreneurs, Phuzamanzi won an award in the Construction category. 'The feeling I had when I won the award is

still raising my hair to this day,' he smiles.

With a small business award to his name and a burgeoning client base, Moloantsoa knew the time was right to expand and to look for gaps in the market to enhance his customer offering. The



**How to up your customer care in 2013**

Mike Anderson, founder and CEO of the National Small Business Chamber, offers the following advice:

**Keep up**



Send a snap mini-survey to your customers via email every quarter. In this way, you can determine how you are improving (or not improving) and you are also showing your customers that you care about their needs.

**Key customers**

Find out who your best customers are and actively thank them. They are the ones you want to keep. Meet them, communicate with them and learn all about them so you're able to understand their needs. Help them achieve their goals, and you'll automatically achieve your own. And remember, good customers aren't necessarily the ones who spend the most, but the ones who will send more business your way.

**Add value**



Effective and unique loyalty programmes can give you the extra edge in retaining customers, especially those who have given you long-term support. The focus should be to reward the 20% of your customer base who have contributed to 80% of your sales. It's important, however, that the rewards programme is unique, value driven and meaningful.

**The right stuff**

Surround yourself with the right people. Employing staff that fit into your office culture is vital in a small business environment. Before you employ people, take them out for lunch or invite them on an office outing.

**Holistic approach**

The total customer experience needs to be managed and monitored all the time. There is no alternative but full-circle customer-relationship management for all. After all, sales are key. If you have an abundance of sales, cash will flow. And if cash flows, you can fix anything.