



# ORCHESTRATE TO INNOVATE

Millions of FNB customers get value from its Smart Solutions and the division's CEO Line Wiid says more creativity is the key to further success

BY KERRY DIMMER

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Let's ignore for a moment that the Smart Solutions division of First National Bank (FNB) – which Line Wiid heads as its CEO – contributes 21% to total FNB profits. Let's skim over the R1.45-billion profit Smart Solutions made in 2011, and perhaps pay no mind to the 23% contribution it makes to total retail profits of the bank.

Instead, let's focus on the 60% of FNB customers to whom Smart Solutions gives value, which equates to 4.2 million South Africans earning up to R100 000 per annum. Developing, producing and marketing value products that address this mass market means meeting some unique challenges, in particular banking affordability, something the SA banking sector has been criticised for.

'What we have to do,' explains Wiid, 'is become increasingly more cost conscious and drive efficient, and develop alternative channels that not only make banking more affordable for our customers, but simultaneously more convenient. There is only one way to do this, in my opinion, and that is through innovation. It's absolutely key to our past and continued success.'

FNB is so deeply entrenched in a culture of innovation that it annually recognises internal contributions (that are made to ensure more efficient and effective systems and procedures) through its FNB Innovators Competition. Smart Solutions has implemented 242 ideas over the past seven years and won the competition five times. Wiid confirms that it is this type of philosophy that inspires her division to evolve and innovate, especially within the digital environment.

'It's no longer about bricks and mortar and having banks on every corner,' says Wiid. 'What people want today are solutions and initiatives that allow them access to their banking 24/7, whether that be in their homes, in their pockets or anywhere they might find themselves.'

A good example of how innovation through technology has enabled FNB to evolve and design solutions, is eWallet – a product that allows



customers to send cash in real time to anyone with a SA cellphone number via cellphone banking, ATM or online banking. The recipient doesn't need to have a bank account to access the cash.

'We are also continuously expanding our cellphone banking solutions and introducing increased opportunities for cardless banking transactions at ATMs,' explains Wiid. 'The beauty of our 144 EasyPlan branches is that these outlets are paperless, cashless, biometrically enabled and cost less to build and run. And because they only sell three products, they're in a position to provide very low banking fees. In fact, our rates are currently the lowest in the market.'

Financial literacy is something Wiid is passionate about, which is why she is so proud of the videos that Smart Solutions has been posting on YouTube.

'We cannot bank SA sustainably if we don't effectively empower our customers with the right financial knowledge to independently manage their finances. There's a great need for this type of information in the mass market segment that Smart Solutions serves. Financial literacy is not only important for understanding the banking environment, but for SA as a whole.'

Wiid is also strongly motivated by mentoring. 'I've mentored people from differing organisational levels, from juniors to seniors. I think it's really important for individuals to have a very clear view on what they want a mentor to do. Mentoring is not just a chat session and there can be very different expectations from both sides.'

Constant and clear communication is crucial to Wiid. 'I respect that each individual's interpretation is uniquely their own, but it's vital that any message we give out is tailored to the same end result,' she says. It's this philosophy that aligns her style of leadership so closely with the FNB ethos that encourages owner-manager principles within its management structure.

'I am not a command-and-control executive, in fact I wouldn't do at all well in a hierarchical situation. Rather, I prefer to facilitate, to challenge and co-ordinate. I like to set targets for the various business units, which are also individually operated according to owner-manager principles.'

This translates into Wiid being the catalyst that ensures the Smart Solutions vision and its strategies are all moving towards a common goal. The resulting problem, although she doesn't quite see it as serious, is that it's harder to balance work and play. 'I need to be available to assist and debate, remove obstacles or generally make a decision at any time. It's irrelevant whether it's after usual business hours.'

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