

COVER INTERVIEW

record delivery

The Scribante Group's specialities range from laying infrastructure for optimal mining to rehabilitation after operations end, says CEO Franco Scribante. By KERRY DIMMER

Mining is a messy business and

involves a mixed bag of activities. What is often forgotten is that it is temporary and mineral resources are eventually exhausted. The land should be returned to a safe, self-sustaining and stable condition, as close as possible to its original untouched state.

But not all mining houses have the expertise required to successfully rehabilitate affected areas. Often this task is contracted to specialists such as the Scribante Group.

The company has a history of successful mine rehabilitation, which was acknowledged with a Gold Award from BHP Billiton for promoting a culture of excellence and adopting BECSA systems with regards to rehabilitation. This, in turn, has resulted in increased capacity and improved safety and productivity results in the Contractor Company category.

Further evidence of its success includes a number of other certificates: from Impala Platinum, in recognition for service excellence delivered to the Impala 17 Shaft project; and from Samancor's Middelburg Ferrochrome, for the group's commitment and loyalty to the PSP3 project.

The group received three certifications from ISOQAR – ISO 9001:2008, ISO 14001:2004, OHSAS 18001:2007 – for fully integrating safety, health, environmental and quality management systems in civil and structural construction, material handling, opencast

mining and rehabilitation services. Considering that the company branched out from civil construction into the mining sector a mere 10 years ago, this kind of recognition is of particular significance to its CEO, especially since the South African mining sector has a choice of some 10 000 contractors with whom to do business.

Scribante says: 'Private operators are in the minority in the contract mining industry, but this gives us certain advantages, particularly top management's ability to be closer to the coalface and therefore able to make important decisions with a minimum turnaround time, which is where we excel.

'The management team at Scribante consists of a few highly skilled, hands-on and dedicated individuals, more often found on site than in the office, allowing us to make immediate decisions,' he says.

'This gives us a valuable advantage when projects need to be completed in what other contractors consider an impossible time frame.'

The Scribante operating formula has proven to be enormously successful for 75 years, which is when it was established by Franco Scribante's grandfather, after whom he was named.

His grandfather emigrated to South Africa with his brother from Italy in 1937 to help pioneer the construction of roads with a special focus on tunnelling through mountains.

When Scribante's grandfather died he handed the reins over to his son Romeo, 19, who had a civil engineering degree. Romeo inherited his father's vision and continued to build up the family business until he handed the reins over to the current CEO.

Scribante says that the evolution into mining was a natural shift in strategy for the Scribante team, although civil roadworks still remains its core business.

'Economically it was time for us to gear up and broaden our horizons,' confirms Scribante. 'Today mining and mining-related services provide the bulk of our turnover and not just from a rehabilitation aspect.

'We are involved in initial mine infrastructure including water piping, storm water canal development, temporary and permanent access roads/railway lines and sidings. We are also proficient in shaft pre-sinking and prospecting box cuts, among other services.'

Such infrastructural contracting applies equally to opencast or conventional pit mining. In fact, the company has a broad range of clients and is contracted to the who's who of South Africa's mining industry, including BECSA, Anglo Coal, Impala Platinum, Aquarius Platinum, Richards Bay Minerals, Wesizwe Platinum, Metix, Bateman, Gold One, Uranium One and Alusaf.

'Our success has largely been a result of how we manage risk. We don't, for

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PHOTOGRAPHY BRETT RUBIN

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instance, take on projects that we believe have unrealistic requirements. We have to be completely confident that the time frames and the expectations of our clients can be met before we commit to a project,' says Scribante.

Recent proof of the group's commitment to its clients was when Anglo Coal needed a project completed within four months. Scribante was not only convinced that they could achieve this goal, but that they could successfully finalise the project within two months – which they did.

Where the company really excels is in mining rehabilitation. Scribante provides input from the design and technical phase of a rehabilitation project through to its final execution.

The public generally sees the devastating effects of mineral exploitation when a mining operation ceases: large tailing piles, massive holes and dirty water pools. Rehabilitation objectives should ideally be defined at the start of a mining project with mine operators, government and stakeholders. This usually happens with newer operations; but at older mines these objectives are not as clear.

Scribante has the ability and capacity to completely remodel an area so that mined land has future value. This may require land contouring with gradients, or levelling out to create agriculture farmlands. In all cases landfill comprises waste from the mining activity. It does help if the rehabilitation

plan is included in the mining process from scratch, such as the stockpiling of topsoil.

'We also take into account waterways and the best use of mining pool stocks, so that should an ecosystem be the ultimate goal, the water that already exists can be incorporated into a wetland.

'In most cases the area that we rehabilitate ends up looking even better than before mining started and is stable enough for the intended end purpose, be it housing development or agriculture,' he says.

'This aspect of our work is well aligned to the pursuit of sustainable development that mining houses require and we place great emphasis on this. We understand and appreciate that to achieve this objective mines need to employ the services of a contractor such as Scribante that takes a holistic view to mining operations and understands the environmental impact of the full cycle of operations,' he says.

This is particularly useful for reducing the cost of rehabilitation. Residual waste is characterised to determine its value as an opportunity or a hazard and if separation is incorporated during mining, Scribante can further speed up rehabilitation with greater cost savings.

The company also believes in being self-sustainable and therefore has incorporated its own mechanical and engineering facility that is able to produce materials-handling

components such as buckets and tanks. 'We keep as much as we can in-house and in so doing keep all our bases covered,' says Scribante.

Service excellence for Scribante means ensuring that the standards of its ISO certification are upheld throughout its divisions and that its existing fleet of plant machinery is maintained and renewed.

Quality assurance is a vital consideration for both internal and external processes, as is regular environmental reviews and auditing all operations. This ensures that the company's environmental management systems are continuously improved.

With offices in Durban, Richards Bay, Witbank, Rustenburg, Port Elizabeth and the head office in Johannesburg, Scribante is well positioned to execute its services in all major mining areas within South Africa.

'We are not, however, excluding the rest of Southern Africa. We are seriously looking at Mozambique, Botswana and Swaziland and, if required, will obviously consider other opportunities further north of our borders.'

The group is more than happy to double its productivity if needed, but wants to remain dependable without compromising its integrity, safety values and service excellence.

'We are the long-term choice, from a sustainability and project performance perspective. We've proven that for 75 years,' he concludes. **MD**