

Creating jobs, touching lives – it's a gift

THIS week, Proudly South African (Proudly SA) features essay GIFTS and the role the company plays in making a real difference in touching lives and creating sustainable jobs in South Africa.

"In May 2006 essay GIFTS secured its first order from the City of Johannesburg for 5 000 gifts and this created temp jobs for 50 people, in an area with an 80 percent unemployment rate," says Beatrice Delpierre, operations director for essay GIFTS.

"We delivered on our promise to the City and presented them with world class gifts in time for the 2010 World Cup hand-over ceremony in Germany."

The company achieves its success by facilitating business opportunities between the formal economy, corporate entities and government clients and the informal sector. "Specifically, we work with rural crafters and young designers in the corporate, promotional, complimentary gifting and the conference accessories industries," says Delpierre.

"We act as a bridge between our clients and our partner factories and manage the process to ensure

that these small businesses deliver a world class product on time, every time. Our aim is to assist specifically disadvantaged communities that lack access to the market and don't know how to engage in the business economy."

She says they also promote the meaningful integration of low technology, hand-made and low-cost products into an economy that today competes with Chinese products. The integration requires expensive technology and is mass produced.

The main task of essay GIFTS is to motivate the clients and market to invest their promotional budgets in the partner factories.

Although locally produced gifts can be more expensive than imported items, the additional cost of producing gifts not only in South Africa, but specifically by rural producers, provides the client with a valuable brand building opportunity – namely, demonstrating that they support employment creation.

This in turn assists with building their social capital and goodwill among their stakeholders.

She says one of the biggest challenges for essay GIFTS has been to access the market, as the industry

is flooded with cheap imports from the East. "When we entered the market there was a lot of scepticism from potential clients due to their previous experience with local manufacturers, such as late delivery and bad quality products."

All the products are sold at Santé Wellness Centre in Paarl and sales agents.

"The company started with one staff member in the office and four employees in our ceramic factory, with not one single product. Five years later, we have four staff members working in our two regional offices and employ 31 full time staff at our ceramic factory."

Delpierre says developing essay GIFTS has been a learning process. "We have had many successes and learnt from our challenges over the last five years. Temporary and full-time employment opportunities have been created for many low skilled and unskilled South Africans, and opportunities provided by essay GIFTS have enabled our production partners to increase the skills of their staff.

"Certainly, one of the main rewards is hearing the stories of the people we work with every day. We've seen a 45-year-old disabled



HARD WORK: From left to right: Rial Visagle (Director), Beatrice Delpierre (Operations Director) and Pardon Padda creating a Proudly SA, Essay GIFT product.

woman earn her first income. We've seen the confidence of unemployed individuals grow after a few months, enabling them to seek better opportunities."

The company decided to become part of Proudly SA because it shares the same values, such as high quality, and locally made products that respect the environment and are made under fair labour practices.

She added that anyone could

achieve any dream with "hard work, passion and believing in yourself". "But the biggest reward in life is not the money you make but the journey you take to become successful. We also believe in the words of Anton Rupert: 'The more you give away, the more you will receive.' essay GIFTS is an example of a business that was started with little cash and has since worked on contracts with some of the top brands in the world."