

Dedication and a helping hand on journey to success

Wood Southern Africa and Timber Times visited Hendrick Rankhododo owner of furniture manufacturing company Rankbar, to learn more about how he grew his business from a two man operation to a medium sized company in just seven years.

Hendrick acquired his woodworking skills during a long tenure at Maraisburg-based furniture manufacturer Roodefurn. In October 2007, Hendrick and his son Mashudu started manufacturing furniture from a very modest facility in Pennyville, Johannesburg. He experimented with different styles of furniture and finishes to determine how he could differentiate his business.

Three months after setting out on his own, Hendrick received a major boost when he secured contracts to supply furniture giant Etienne Lewis in Pretoria and Johannesburg-based home decor stores Lots and Crates.

Hendrick's commitment and drive caught the attention of one of his previous employers and a Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) development company who assisted him in moving to a larger factory facility in Denver, Johannesburg. The duo worked from the Pennyville factory for a year and a half before relocating to Denver. Soon luxury furniture stores Essops and Coricraft also signed contracts with Rankbar. At first Essops only placed small orders, but later volumes increased. A few smaller companies also still place orders with Rankbar. These include lounge franchise Comfee Lounge and Potchefstroom-based furniture and decor store Deans Decor.

Rankbar achieved excellent growth at its Denver factory, renting more adjacent factory space to expand. Hendrick had 13 employees when he moved to the Denver factory and today the company boasts a staff complement of 70 and is again ready to start a new chapter.



Tables and chairs coming together at Rankbar's factory in Denver, Johannesburg

"The 1 500 m² Denver factory really enabled us to grow our business, but we have now again reached our capacity and we will move to a new larger factory facility soon."

The new 6 500 m² factory is based in Roodepoort and has been specially designed to accommodate production lines in one space. "Our current factory is disjointed and we do not have all our staff and production lines in one building. The new premises is much more modern and is designed to accommodate many processes under one roof. This will increase our quality control and speed up processes."

Product overview

Rankbar specialises in bedroom suites, dining room suites and lounge furniture. The company has an upholstery division and employs several seamstresses. Products are produced mainly from board products, but a fair amount of solid wood is also used.

Hendrick says that a local board distributor in its areas, Woodcentre, assisted the company with flexible payment options and this helped a great deal in getting Rankbar off the ground. The company also does excellent finishing work through spraying by hand. Products finished in modern satin white and pastels are destined for Lots and Crates and Coricraft, while traditional antique stained furniture in popular mahogany is destined for other stores.

Rankbar opts for acid catalysed (AC) lacquers from Durban coating producer Technipaint. Owing to its affordability and durability, AC lacquers are still widely used in South Africa. In the meanwhile, Rankbar is also working with Technipaint to develop light brown oak and walnut coatings to create vintage or weathered looking finishes. The company will start testing the new colours when it moves to its new factory.

Looking back

Hendrick reflected on the road behind him, saying it was trying at times, but that he believed in the business with every fibre of his being and giving up was simply not an option.

"It is very humbling reporting on the success of our business. It was extremely hard work to get here and we faced many challenges around every corner.

"I started this business during the recession and the risks were high. I remember the sinking feeling I experienced when my house was on the line. However, even in those tough times I believed that I could make it. I told myself that I will make it." Hendrick certainly overcame many challenges and showed



Operators using the rip saw which was supplied by Donald Fuchs Machinery



Satin finished side tables ready for their final touches

great tenacity, but thankfully he did not have to do it all alone. Hendrick explains that Donald Fuchs, owner of Donald Fuchs Machinery, played an instrumental role in the success of the business.

“One of the biggest challenges I faced when starting my own business was the availability of capital to invest in machinery. I was very fortunate to be approached by Donald Fuchs who gave me a panel saw and spindle free of charge.

“I knew that I could not run a business without those machines, but it was only years later that I really realised the significance of that gesture. Without the generosity of Donald, I would most likely not be where I am today.

“Donald and I went to the Ligna trade fair in Germany together one year. We got to know each better and today I consider him one of my role models,” concludes Hendrick.

Looking forward

Rankbar is an excellent example of how B-BBEE, small business and entrepreneurial funding and development programmes can change people's lives and stimulate economic development. Initiatives like these do not only create employment, but they also give skilled people the opportunity to transfer their knowledge.

That is exactly what Hendrick has done as well. He has personally trained each one of his staff members, providing them with essential and traditional woodworking skills. Rankbar has acquired several woodworking machines such as panel saws, a rip saw, a stroke sander, a drill press and a milling borer through the years, but recognizes that it will have to start modernising.

When funds are available the company plans to acquire a beam saw, CNC and edgebander and reports that these panel processing machines will enable it to grow further.

By Sinette Goosen

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