

Joest Kwatani pioneers new approaches to screen supply

A company that has applied some innovative thinking to the way in which it does business with the mining industry is Joest Kwatani, a Level 3 Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment manufacturer of vibrating screens and feeders.

Kim Schoepflin, MD of Joest Kwatani, says that the 40-year-old local original equipment manufacturer (OEM) is taking the lead in the screening sector to help mines cut costs in a more responsible and sustainable manner.

The company has achieved this by investing more into its research and development (R&D) capacities to continuously improve the performance of its solutions, while positioning itself as a consultant on all screening related matters. Schoepflin says that this approach is geared at countering some of the worrying trends she sees in the industry.

Firstly, she is very concerned about the “extreme cost-cutting exercises that have seen the industry bleed critical skills” including the artisans and operators needed to optimally operate and maintain a screening plant over its entire life. Technical skills are also being shed in essential R&D departments in both mining houses and mines and some of the vendors that serve them.

As Schoepflin points out, this drastic measure inevitably leads to a marked under-performance of plant and equipment, while total cost of ownership soars. Joest Kwatani is responding to these challenges by taking a completely different approach to doing business with its mining customer base.

“Suppliers to the mines need to break the traditional way of doing business – selling plant and equipment and then moving on to the next sale. We have established open and transparent communication channels with our market, sharing best practices in screening and how to feed optimal tonnages of ore at the lowest cost with our customers,” she says.

An example of this is Joest Kwatani’s contractual risk or gain sharing business relationship



Kim Schoepflin, MD, and Derrick Alston, CEO, in front of a coal grizzly screen at the Joest Kwatani works.

with mines. Instead of merely supplying a screen to a mine at a fixed price, this model sees OEMs and vendors share in the gains mines enjoy from efficient screening solutions.

According to Schoepflin, this approach incentivises vendors and mines to make better decisions concerning the project.

“At this point in time, I’m not convinced that suppliers are being adequately incentivised to deliver optimal solutions for projects. However, this type of contractual arrangement aligns the interests of both mine and supplier. This formula of sharing tonnage and risk positions Joest Kwatani as a provider of value rather than a purveyor of products and services,” she says.

Schoepflin believes there are not many screen suppliers who would be willing to enter into such agreements with mines. Joest Kwatani is able to offer such a service because it has an intimate understanding of its customers’ businesses and operational challenges, and – as Schoepflin points out – without this knowledge “there is simply no basis for gain sharing”.

A milestone for the company, in terms of these agreements, is its 11-year contract with a Limpopo-based miner to replace, refurbish, service and maintain 96 coal screening machines at the largest coal processing complex in the world.

Due to the dearth of skills on mines, she also believes that customised service level agreements are key.

“Sub-standard maintenance is being undertaken on plants. At times it is reactive as

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feature

opposed to being proactive, leading to further costs to the mines. Screening machines are such important elements in the process that regimented maintenance programmes are critical to ensuring ongoing efficient operation and improved yield," says Schoepflin.

A structured service programme allows mines to select a package that matches their existing needs and the resources of the plant. This offering has been well received by mines, and Joest Kwatani has fixed-year, multi-service level agreements in place with coal, diamond, iron ore and manganese plant operators.

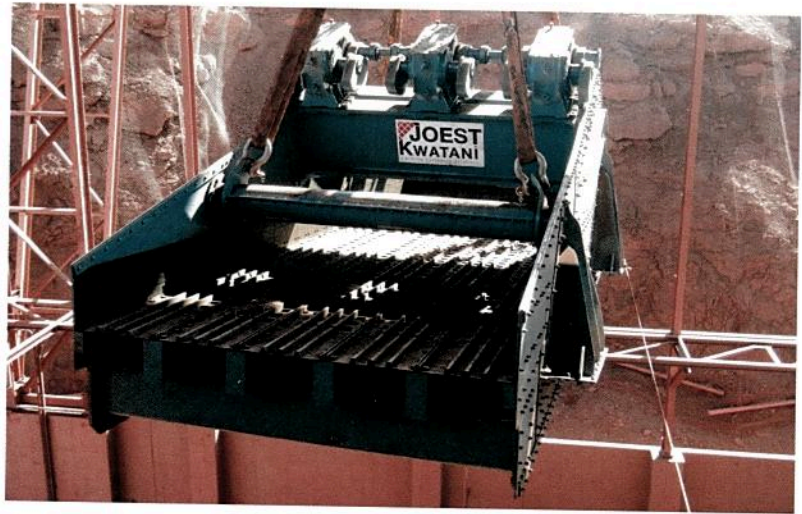
Equally concerning for Schoepflin is the number of mines now opting for lightweight screens to reduce costs. This trend, she says, is very apparent on new projects where the benefits of longevity as a result of superior design are being completely overlooked by some project houses and mines.

She says mines should rather be making informed decisions that are based on striking a healthy balance between cost, performance and reliability of the equipment. However, this trend will see an increase in demand for advanced condition monitoring services and technologies, which Joest Kwatani has developed over many years.

Schoepflin says that the company has taken conventional condition monitoring practices to the next level by bringing advanced testing and measuring technology to the table. This is complemented by the company's thorough understanding of screen operation in harsh operating conditions, and it applies this intellectual property in its consultations with various mines.

While expertise is important, it needs to be supported by a quality product. As such, Schoepflin places ongoing research and development high on her agenda. She says this is key to Joest Kwatani retaining its cutting-edge in the industry.

"Suppliers to the mines should take a more



A Joest Kwatani 53-ton exciter driven scalping screen being installed at an iron ore mine.

strategic approach to cutting costs. I would argue that today's difficult operating conditions warrant increasing investment into all facets of R&D programmes. We have found that, by doing this, we have bolstered our abilities to improve productivity and accelerate our time to market. It also ensures that we are well positioned for the future when the commodity prices eventually improve – which they will," says Schoepflin.

More recently, Joest Kwatani supplied its latest range of screens to a large iron ore mining operation in Kathu. Being exciter driven, these screens provide increased G-forces improving recovery of ferro-silicon media and screening efficiency and reducing maintenance costs.

As she points out, Joest Kwatani's R&D programmes involve collaborating with the mines. This has given the company an in-depth understanding of downstream and upstream processes, as well as the limitations of flow sheets.

"Staying abreast of wear technology allows us to assess all available options and then select the most appropriate solution. We have used this know-how to improve our vibrating screening and feeding machines, as well as exciter gearboxes and unbalanced motor drive units. This is an ongoing exercise," says Schoepflin. ■

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