

Elegant Group—leading the way in fuel wholesale and distribution

The Elegant Group is the product of a growing need for different service offerings across the board

What started as a petroleum distribution company has grown into something much larger, with a significant impact on the petrochemical industry, as well as the communities in which it operates.

“The Elegant Group began as Elegant Fuel, when a gap was spotted in the downstream petroleum market,” explains founder Ockie Strydom. “It was relatively unheard of for independents to lay claim to the market share of the bigger players, but at the time oil majors were undergoing a period of retreat, and smaller players moved in to fulfil the needs in the distribution business.”

“The business was founded with a focus on the smaller users of petroleum that had been neglected by the oil majors. As the group started to grow, we received an excellent response from the communities and each year found our venture to be more and more successful with the company continuing to grow,” he says.

More than a fuel provider

The Elegant Group is more than just a fuel and service provider, offering fuel distribution, liquid petroleum gas (LPG), construction and maintenance services and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) across the board. The company has white-labelled and Elegant Fuel branded forecourts across Limpopo and into Gauteng and the North West and beyond.

“Through our construction and maintenance division, we are able to provide a turnkey solution, from conception to design and, ultimately, the build. This extends from diesel depots at mines and transporters, to fully-fledged forecourts,” explains Strydom.



Ockie Strydom, founder

“We recently completed a knockdown-rebuild on what is now one of our flagship stations on the N1 in Musina, connecting South Africa to the rest of the Southern African Development Community countries.”

Elegant Fuel is one of the few independent oil companies invited every second year to Petroforum Africa, the largest petroleum trade event in the world, which allows it to offer its clients the latest and best petroleum-related products and services at excellent prices through its relationship with providers.

Proudly South African

Strydom explains that the Elegant Group, at its core, is a South African company. “We have South African roots, are locally owned, and as a group we strongly believe in the continuous upliftment of local individuals and communities.

“We place great emphasis on ensuring clients receive a steady supply stream. This includes 24/7 delivery schedules, as well as open and transparent communication with clients around the clock,” he says.

Strydom started in the public sector and moved to the private sector much later in his career. He had various mentors along the way, who inspired him to reach new heights and to apply his specialist skills to build something that could have a bigger positive impact on people’s lives. He saw a gap in the petroleum industry market, and as they say, the rest is history.

As founder he is actively involved in the varied marketing initiatives of the group, strategic planning, and working closely with the rest of the directors and team to ensure excellent client service and delivery at all times.

“The fuel industry in South Africa is a highly regulated one, with high barriers to entry and small profit margins,” explains Strydom. “Although a robust and thriving industry with incredible investment opportunities to diversify and grow the business, we’ve found that over the years many of the oil majors have begun selling off equipment and infrastructure with little innovation and creativity to fill the gaps.

“The industry is dominated by monopolies, and lacks innovation. There is a great deal of inflexibility around service offerings for consumers, and it is within these and other gaps that the independents have begun responding to opportunities within the framework of the regulations,” he says.

Working towards sustainable change

Strydom explains that Elegant Group welcomes new market entrants as ultimately, new players level out the playing field and create sustainable

jobs while uplifting communities and empowering the people therein, an important focus area of Elegant Group. One of their initiatives being Project Themba, focusing on creating real, sustainable changes in people’s lives, and in turn the lives of their communities.

“Meaning ‘hope’ in isiZulu, with the project, we selected previously disadvantaged individuals from the communities in which we work and trained them as artisans in the trades and skills required in our industry,” says Strydom. “Our training covered fields such as welding, pump and tank installations, as well as maintenance for technicians.

“Although there are a handful of projects like ours that operate in the Limpopo region, we have found that we no longer need to actively seek employment for our Project Themba graduates.

As the project matures and we continue with a consistent output of qualified graduates, our partners and clients have begun approaching them and offering them work,” he explains.

Project Themba has been a success so far, and the programme has grown from having just two people on the project at its inception, to 10 individuals currently in the programme.

“We are proud of the fact that many of our businesses have a knock-on effect in uplifting communities, creating sustainable jobs, and empowering people to create their own positive influences in their own communities,” says Strydom. “We genuinely believe in transformation within our industry, and have been privileged enough to be able to play a meaningful part in that.”

Apart from their commitment to Project Themba, the company runs skills programmes within the communities in which we operate that successfully create new, sustainable jobs while unleashing individuals’ potential to start their own projects, ultimately contributing to the cycle of growth.

Innovative responsibility

The Elegant Group’s involvement in liquid petroleum gas (LPG) is an effort to be responsible corporate citizens. As a by-product of natural

gas processing and oil refining, LPG is a non-renewable gaseous fossil fuel that is flammable but non-toxic and a mixture of propane and butane.

“As a group we do have an on-going commitment to being greener and following environmental guidelines, and although a fossil fuel, LPG is relatively clean when compared to fuels such as coal and oil,” says Strydom.

“LPG produces less air pollution in terms of soot particles, nitrogen oxides and sulphur, as well as fewer carbon dioxide emissions. In fact, when used in vehicles, LPG produces up to 40% less carbon dioxide emissions than petrol-fuelled vehicles. In contemporary energy lingo, LPG burns cleanly,” he explains.

The benefits that LPG offers are seen in its cost-effectiveness, efficiency and environmental friendliness. It is these benefits that make it an essential ingredient in the creation of a planet that needs to “consume with care”, and a necessity for all households and businesses going forward.

Its many uses extend from the industrial to the personal, and using LPG in your home, for cooking and heating, has benefits that span the economic to the environmental. One of the key advantages is that the flame is hotter than that of coal, natural gas, petrol or diesel making it not only a more efficient fuel resource, but also has the ability to go a lot further.

Aiming above and beyond

“Our commitment to quality service sets us apart from our competitors. As a group, we pride ourselves on going above and beyond what one would expect from a service provider,” says Strydom. “We put 110% into the work that we do, and believe that throughout all of our ventures we provide impeccable service to all clients, helping them to make the most of their own businesses, which in turn helps to grow the economy and wealth of our country.

“We have more than 60 years’ combined experience in the field, and hands-on directors who take ownership of the day-to-day running of the company. The combination of these two factors ensures that there are always

knowledgeable, capable people on hand to deal with customers’ needs,” he explains.

Elegant Fuel, as a part of the Elegant Group, is a registered member of the South African Petroleum Industry Association, which means that we adhere to, and comply with, very strict environmental regulations. This is a prerequisite for all fuel distributors to attain their wholesale licence. In addition to this, while working with any of the oil majors, companies are also expected to adhere to very stringent international regulations.

“We abide by all health, safety, security and environment (HSSE) codes and also go above and beyond as evident in the opening of our own PPE business venture, thus taking the safety of our employees into our own hands,” says Strydom. “Procurement of the best PPE equipment for our employees is of the utmost importance. The safety, environmental and community elements all speak to the heart of what the Elegant Group stands for.”

Hard work and good leadership

Strydom explains that as a start-up, one of the biggest challenges faced was that of brand recognition. “When you are an independent playing in the “big guys” space, you need to work that much harder to gain the trust of consumers. There are many high barriers to entry within the industry, which takes a lot of time and hard work to overcome. There is no quick fix.”

He believes the three most important qualities needed to create and maintain a successful business are innovation against industry norms, flexibility and maintaining a strong, but fair leadership.

“At the heart of the Elegant Group, burns an entrepreneurial spirit. I believe that with an entrepreneurial mind-set, we are shifting the goal posts of what successful companies in South Africa look like,” says Strydom.

“I have always believed in looking after our employees first and not only looking at the bottom line. I believe Larry Page (co-founder of Google) said it best: “Always deliver more than expected.” We at the Elegant Group will continue to do that,” he concludes. ▲

