

# INDUSTRY IN-DEPTH

By Saralee Gunns

## DAN BARNARD

**Dan Barnard has been making his mark in the signage industry for the past fifteen years. Recently appointed as Managing Director of Claude Neon, PSD talks to Dan about his flourishing career and determined dedication to his family, his faith and the ever-bright future.**

Describe in short your life leading up to the start of your career and from that point to your current position (schooling, jobs, positions etc.)

I completed schooling in Durban, 1987, and then joined the SAP with the intention to study but this never materialised. In 1990 I left the SAP and started to learn and understand the world of sales, experiencing different sales markets. I got involved in selling language programmes, insurance policies, then selling houses and then signage - this was the one that really grabbed me.

My brother-in-law owned his own sign company in Durban (Creative Signs) and I started learning from him in 1993. The beauty of a small company is that it's relational and you can get involved in all aspects. We did the sales, helped build the signs with the factory staff, assisted in installations and collected the final payment. This laid a great foundation in learning and understanding the signage business.

In 2000 I joined Claude Neon in Durban as a representative and re-located to Johannesburg in 2001. In 2002 I was given an opportunity to develop the African Market with great success. In 2006 I left the company for personal reasons, rejoined in 2008 and was appointed as Managing Director in June this year. I am excited and honoured to represent a 73 year-old company. Claude Neon Limited is a well-known company in South Africa and Africa. It has stagnated in the market and I personally believe that we will become the number one preferred supplier again.

### **Do you have a family i.e. married, children?**

I am married to Chantelle - a great supportive and loving wife - she owns her own residential letting business in Krugersdorp. I have three children - two beautiful daughters (my shotgun is ready) and my pride, my boytjie, who is three years old.

### **What challenges have you faced and how did you overcome them?**

I have had many challenges in life. One of them was children - my wife was told that she would not be able to have any at the time that we wanted them. We

both wanted kids and through our faith we believed that God would help us and He did not fail, he gave us three! My biggest challenge currently is that right now the company has many challenges ahead but we have a vision and the values are being put in place to achieve that vision. The light or the future is very bright at the end of the tunnel for Claude Neon.

### **What significant industry related changes have you noticed over the period of time you have been a part of it?**

There are too many small signage companies. The industry is a 2 Billion Rand industry and too many players that are in this industry are ruining this by going out and cutting prices and manufacturing bad quality signs, giving bad service and in doing so damaging signage people and company reputations. Clients are driven by the cheapest price and if this industry can be regulated by price, quality and service, everyone will be able to get a fair share of the pie.

### **What skills have you gained or mastered?**

One of the greatest skills I have learnt is to be patient with people as everyone is wired differently. Secondly, to remain humble no matter who you are



and no matter whom you are dealing with. Thirdly, to treat people the way I want them to treat me (What you sow is what you reap). Have I mastered all these? Some days yes, some days no, but I try harder every day.

**Do you get to travel? And if so, what interesting places have you visited?**

Yes, I love traveling. I have visited a few countries, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Kenya, Nigeria, Accra, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Egypt, Algeria, Jordan, Dubai and Brazil. Most interesting of these was Algeria, it's a great place to visit.

**Are you a collector of anything in particular or do you have a hobby? What do you do in your spare time?**

I love sport (rugby, cricket, squash, anything to do with a ball) – I am a huge Sharks supporter.

**How do you keep yourself motivated?**

I read a lot of books, which helps me to see how others motivate themselves. Motivating yourself is not easy but having faith and believing in something greater than yourself and other people is the secret. For me it is my belief in the Bible, all answers and motivation are in it, we just need to find it.

**What are your thoughts on the signage industry in general?**

The signage industry is a tough market as the competition is great. Most sign companies offer the exact same services; some have unique products but not many. Instead of working together in teams sign companies see each other as threats and work against one another. Each one fights for the whole pie. This business remains exciting and is a great business to be involved in.

**What advice would you give to somebody starting out in the industry?**

Anybody starting out in this industry must ensure he understands the whole process involved in selling, manufacturing, installing and getting payment, as a sale is only a sale once the money is in your account.

**Where do you see yourself in 10 years?**

In 10 years time I see myself retired and living on a nice island, that would be ideal hey? Seriously, in 10 yrs time I see Claude Neon as an empire not only in South Africa but also in the world.

Personally, I am looking forward to building relationships with all the other signage players and would look at doing projects together and strengthening these relations. If you are the owner, CEO, MD of a signage company please give me call and I would love to meet with you over coffee and start working on building a relationship.



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