

A Business RE-IMAGINED

With a new name, a new focus and more on offer, Team Transport & Logistics is strengthening its brand and building on the reputation it has gained over the past three decades. **CHRIS SMITH** talks to Managing Director, Steve Skinner, about the company's future.

It's been a couple of weeks that I have been trying to get a hold of Steve Skinner. I was excited by the prospect of interviewing Steve for two reasons: Firstly because his company has recently changed its name, and secondly because everywhere I go I have seen Team Taxi Trucks & Couriers (TEAM) vehicles.

When I finally get a hold of Steve and tell him what I am after, his first response is, how much is this going to cost me? I realise the first step of being in business so long is watching your costs, the second is being

sceptical of people calling you out of the blue and the third is being upfront from the start - and that's Steve all over.

Steve and fellow Managing Director, Gail Casey, have been working together since 1981, when they first started a taxi truck company. The business is now based in Carole Park in Brisbane and can boast 100 staff, 250 vehicles, and a renewed outlook for the future.

"The name change was a result of a rebranding effort designed to mirror the growth and transformation of our company," says Steve. "The name Team Transport & Logistics reflects better who we are and what we do."

The change, however, was not an overnight decision. The direction of the company shifted just prior

to the GFC in 2007. Steve explains the term taxi truck once used to mean something and reflected the company's sole work.

"The term means you would hire a truck and driver on an hourly rate, which is what we used to do as our base work until about 12 months before the GFC," he says. "We were generally concentrating on the building industry, which is where the taxi truck demand hire trucks come from."

He explains the work included delivering freight for major building suppliers like Boral - picking up plaster board, timber, tiles, roof trusses and frames, amongst other things.

But with the experience of surviving two previous downturns in 1983/84 and 1990, the writing was





At the desk working in operations is Laurie Norman keeping a track of the fleet.



Executive Coordinator Kylie Wilkinson, has been with the company 27 years.



Managing Director Steve Skinner has a renewed vision of the company's future.

on the wall for Steve. 12 months before the GFC actually hit, he realised that the company's primary work could come to an abrupt end at any time and they would be left in a vulnerable position.

"It was at that point that we started to diversify into different fields; we started carting containers off the wharf," he says. "We started to become more than just a taxi truck company for some of our customers, like Beaumont Tiles."

The shift resulted in strong growth for the container business and led to additional work such as unpacking containers - so much so that the company now has an Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) pad. But, Steve is still reluctant to ever move into customs work.

He says the GFC hit his business pretty hard, like it did most carriers, and the company lost a lot of its subcontractors. The only way to survive was to diversify further. Part of the survival strategy was creating new profitable divisions and take on a more holistic perspective.

"We've developed multiple divisions to cater for most customers' transport needs, and we have sub-contractors that do tilt tray work for us, so we can do just about everything," he says. "We've been out there battling in the sales arena really hard since

the GFC. It's hard to keep revenue up, but we've been tightening our belt, cutting costs and we've managed to stay out of the firing line."

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SAFETY IS KEY

As a result, the TT&L business is deceptively relaxed and the staff turnover is low, with most people averaging 10 to 15 years with the company. However, the business is anything but complacent when it comes to safety.

With over 2000 customers and working in a diverse range of industries including mining, engineering and construction, the

company needs to meet rigorous client expectations, in regard to safety and service.

Steve says the difference with having his own staff and a business which uses sub-contractors is, the onus of safety usually shifts to the subbies, which, he adds, is rarely adequate.

TT&L belongs to the National Heavy Vehicle Accreditation Scheme (NHVAS) and all the drivers are holders of industry White Cards. Drivers carry all the necessary equipment for the job and the necessary PPE to ensure safety on any work site.

"As far as pre-inductions go, we work out properly what we're going to need, we have a starting point of about half a dozen blokes for each site because almost every single site in Brisbane has a specific induction," says Steve. "Some of them are five minutes and some of them are five hours. We try and dot all our I's and cross all of our T's before we get to the sites, so there are no hiccups."

Each truck carries a thick folder of all the necessary compliance documentation as well as service histories for all the equipment, including the onboard cranes. Combined with this is access to real time GPS and automated electronic PODs to track and trace all deliveries and drivers at all times.

“Our drivers carry handheld PDA units and record vehicle pre-start checks and site safety inspections at each delivery point,” says Steve.

EQUIPMENT

“It’s interesting from my point of view to be looking at new equipment because generally, in the past, I’ve left it to other people to do so,” Steve adds.

At the moment the company has its own workshop for maintenance, and the truck fleet is made up of Isuzu, DAF, Scania and Kenworth. The Isuzus are used in the eight and 12-tonne segment, while the Kenworths haul the floats.

“As far as equipment goes, we’ve had a pretty good run with Scania and DAF, and we haven’t had a single issue with the Kenworths,” says Steve. “We’ve always tried to stick to the a couple of manufacturers because we run our own workshop and it’s much easier to have the same brand running through

your workshop, certainly for parts and familiarity with the product.”

The nature of the business means the fleet has a broad range of freight to deliver, from a small envelope to much, much larger goods. Steve says it doesn’t matter if it’s long, heavy, light or ugly, they can take it and the service is 24/7.

Vehicles include courier vehicles, one tonne utes with racks, two to 12-tonne flat top tray taxi trucks, crane trucks, semi trailers, tautliners, low loaders, tri and quad floats, drop decks, tilt trays, side loaders, skels, B-doubles, and road trains. TT&L also

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have pilot vehicles for over-dimensional loads, as well as truck mounted forklift vehicles. Plus dangerous goods vehicles and a crane capable of lifting up to eight tonnes at 20 metres reach.

A GROWING COMPANY

The Coal Seam Gas (CSG) industry features heavily in new work for the company. The ‘Projects’ division started four years ago and now generates 20 per cent of the company’s revenue. It is carting B-double loads of dam linings, as well as hire equipment for major customer Coates Hire, both to and from the gas fields in the west. Steve says the good news for this side of the business is the thousands of wells still to be drilled. The Projects division also transports earthmoving tyres from Brisbane, Muswellbrook and through Western Australia, so the business now has a national footprint with contracts in Victoria, New South Wales, as well as north to Mackay and Cairns.

FUTURE DIRECTION

“Sooner or later it’s just going to turn on and we’re going to be flat out again, hopefully within the next 12 months,” predicts Steve.

However, for both Steve, now 66, and Gail, 65, retirement is imminent and the second generation is being prepared to take over the business.

“We’ve both got sons that work in the business and they are pretty keen to step up to it one day,” he says.

It’s an ideal situation for the younger generation to learn and be a part of the decision making processes within the company. The recent retirement of the long serving General Manager has also been a strong catalyst for change within the company’s management structure.

Instead of appointing a new GM, the company has been split into pyramids or silos for each of its divisions.

“Each division’s got a manager, the manager is now responsible for their division,” says Steve. “We have weekly meetings with coordinator Kylie Wilkinson, we’ve got a very close knit team and everyone is taking responsibility for their division.”

Steve explains the new structure is breeding a renewed confidence in the staff and is setting the company up for a smooth leadership transition. “The new structure has certainly been good for developing the managers.” **IID**

