

ZEST DRIVES TECHNOLOGY CENTRE MORE THAN JUST MARKETING TOOL

The model for the Zest Drives Technology Centre, adopted from the one WEG successfully applied in its facility in Brazil, has to date made a huge impact locally.

“We face severe skills shortages in South Africa and it is apparent to all that many mines and process plants no longer have the necessary hands-on skills, especially when it comes to equipment that is more sophisticated or more complicated in set up, operation and maintenance. Hence, our accredited training centre fills a gap to help the end users improve the skills within their operations,” Louis Meiring, managing director of Zest, says.

“The training entity is far more than just a product training scenario and we undertake training for people to retain their status as qualified technicians and at the same time to secure the necessary CPD points for both our drives and soft starter training programmes,” Deon Du Plessis, training officer at Zest, says. Du Plessis undergoes regular training workshops at WEG in Brazil as well as attending international workshops within relevant industry sectors.

“Some of the latest equipment on the market is available in our facility and we interface with other educational institutions. Keeping abreast of the latest

developments in technology is important for Zest to ensure that the information and skills are transferred to end users and industry," Meiring says.

"Training modules are generic for this particular sector of the marketplace and cover theory and hands-on training on drives and soft starters," Du Plessis says. "Within the available modules we cover aspects such as installation set up and commissioning as well as maintenance."

All modules were submitted to the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA) and these were evaluated and adapted to achieve suitability to the relevant needs of the South African industry. "We now have two components of modules, adopted through lessons learnt from years of experience and the coordination and cooperation from ECSA," Du Plessis says.

"Through the interaction of the training officer with the market we have, for example, factored in the distinct differences between the petrochemical industry and the platinum mining or coal mining sectors," Meiring says.

Generic information will remain the same but the applications will vary from end user to end user. Plants are different so modules are adapted to create major added value for the end user. "Zest's programmes are set up to ensure training is applied in a manner suited to the environment so the end user finds himself reaping the benefits through optimum performance of our products," Du Plessis adds.

Zest has replicated its Johannesburg head office training offering throughout the country. "This includes the Drives Technology Centre at Linbro Park (HO), a Drives Technology Centre at our facility in Durban, Drives Technology Centre in Rustenburg and a further one in Cape Town," Du Plessis says. "In addition to training at our Drives Technology Centres, we also do on-site training."

Subjects covered in the training courses include all aspects of variable speed drives; soft start theory and operation; and specialised courses on topics such as Serial Communication and Ethernet control.

"We are now being requested by end users to incorporate similar modules for the other product portfolios such as transformers, generator sets, motors, switchgear and cables," Meiring says.

Chris Watkins, sales manager drives at Zest, says that the training facility is open to industry associations as well as to other educational institutions including SAPMA (SA Pump Manufacturers Association), SAIEE (SA Institute of Electrical Engineers), International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), Technikon SA and other universities.

"Zest Drives Technology Centres also serve a purpose for conducting research and development with end users and consultants. The infrastructure in the drives technology centre simulates the replicating applications, making it easier to

undertake the total solution than trying to commission on site or integrate on site,”

Watkins concludes.