

# Clarion Printed Products enters exciting new phase



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**I**N 1976, Steve Loughton paid R15 000 for a small but well-known printing company in Claremont outside Cape Town, called Clarion Display. Thirty-one years later, in 2007, Clarion Printed Products, with Loughton still at the helm as managing director, is one of South Africa's leading Dekra ISO 9001 certified digital, screen and litho printing companies with operations in Cape Town and Johannesburg, and representation in Durban.

Underscoring its position as a leader in its field, Clarion last year celebrated 30 years with Loughton as managing director by appointing Blake Currie to the position of operations director, Wayne Lotz as technical director and Brian Fortuin as production director, and at the same time concluded a Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) deal. To signify this new generation of management, a fresh new corporate image was introduced and an investment of R6-million was made in new digital printing technology.

It's been a long journey for Clarion and Loughton, fuelled primarily by the managing director and his team's unwavering commitment to quality, reliability and service, which has prevailed for more than three decades.

## At the beginning

Having earned a distinction in gravure printing and retouching/etching at the Cape Technical College, Loughton entered

the printing industry as an apprentice at Pacrite Industries in Cape Town in 1964. For the next nine years, he grew his experience and expertise at companies including Nationale Tydskrifte, ABC Press, Cape Screen Process and Norprint Cape, which was a subsidiary of the UK organisation, Norcross. In 1973, no longer satisfied as simply an employee, Loughton bought Norprint Cape in conjunction with Dennis Nick of Creda Press and Creda Screen was formed. 'During this time, I learnt more about the print business from one of the best teachers around, Dennis Nick,' says Loughton. In 1976, Steve sold his full interest in Creda Screen and purchased Clarion Display from Maurice Sinclair,

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The trio of new Clarion directors, from left to right, Brian Fortuin, Blake Currie and Wayne Lotz.

a well-known and respected Cape Town printer, who had owned the company for thirty years.

Under the direction of a new owner, the small company grew in leaps and bounds. Within just three months of operation, turnover matched the full turnover of the previous year.

In the 1970s Clarion Display became South Africa's first screen-printing company to achieve a R1-million annual turnover. It was later the country's first screen-printing company to realise turnover of R1-million a month.

The Clarion group of companies – comprising, at the time, Clarion Display (Pty) Ltd, Clarion Adgear, Clarion Design and Clarion Self Adhesives – was established with Loughton as managing director and chairman, and the organisation moved to Epping in 1976.

In 1986 Clarion Adgear was sold and Clarion purchased the full interest in Matthey Printed Products from a subsidiary of Johnson Matthey PLC (UK). The company was reconstituted as Clarion Printed Products.

'Clarion's policy of 'quality, reliability and service' has been the cornerstone of the company from day one, ensuring that our customers enjoy good working relationships with us,' says Loughton. 'At the end of the day, both our customers and Clarion want it to be a good experience – customers should not have to struggle with their print supplier to get a job well done and delivered on time.'

In 2006 Loughton realised his commitment to BEE and a deal was concluded internally when 26% of the company was sold to Brian Fortuin, who was previously production manager for Clarion and has 28 years of service with the company. The Green Valley Trust made funding for this deal possible.

'The BEE deal was part of a process in which Clarion Trust sold a 36% stake in the company to Brian Fortuin, Blake Currie and Wayne Lotz, with 26% being the BEE component,' explains Loughton. 'The intention was always to make equity available internally to our key staff and, in so doing, enact the real intentions of BEE. So I am delighted that we were able to conclude our BEE deal internally and I welcome Brian, Blake and Wayne to the board of directors.'

### The business today

Clarion – which operates two distinctive divisions, Visual Graphics and Marking Systems – manufactures all printed products using screen, litho and digital print processes, with 'a special focus on those products that are technically more challenging'.

The organisation's digital department operates state-of-the-art, high resolution large and medium format digital machines. The screen-printing plant operates a range of large and small format, and

Some of the recent large format work done by Clarion Printed Products.



Right: Clarion recently advanced its capabilities and offerings with a R6-million investment in new equipment.



fully and semi-automated screen-printing machines that provide the capacity to print numerous different formats. A third print process comprises litho graphic equipment.

Clarion Visual Graphics specialises in large format printing, using both screen and printing processes. The company says it has the ability to add value to existing designs through the combination of both these print processes, and also through the creative use of print, using interactive and decorative ink technology such as glitter, UV and glow-in-the-dark materials and techniques.

Last year the company invested R6-million in new digital printing technology to extend its capabilities, particularly for branding, marketing, events and the retail industry.

The new technology includes a HP Scitex XL-jet three meter super wide-format digital inkjet printer with a 360dpi capability for outdoor billboards, fleet graphics and signage, and a digital medium-

format printer with true 720dpi and capable of up to 1440dpi photo-realistic images ideal for POS display prints, exhibition display unit prints, retail, window and floor graphics.

Clarion also added a 1,6m wide Mimaki direct fabric sublimation printer to its stable of equipment, which already included two Mimaki 2,5m wide large-format machines. The machines print directly in high resolution onto fabric, which is then heat fixated through a high specification calendaring machine. The products created are ideal for indoor and outdoor fabric POS display, exhibition units and event branding where fabric is the preferred option.

Two high-resolution Epson Stylus Pro 7600 digital inkjet printers with a maximum resolution of 1440dpi were also been added to cater for the high quality end of the paper poster market. Clarion's printers are all colour calibrated using Gretag Macbeth's Eye-One colour management system.

Currie says that, although the cornerstone of the business will always be quality, reliability and service, the company strives to add value to its clients through innovative print solutions and people who understand colour management.

'Our new technology means we can offer high speed, wide-format, photo real digital prints and direct, digital, sublimation fabric printing – and size is not an obstacle,' he says. 'We can do massive, top quality prints. And we can add enormous value to clients by offering multi-process printing where litho, screen and digital printing are combined. Add to that our young, energetic team who understand colour management and we believe we have a winning formula for the future.'

### New look for new generation company

Celebrating its new team of directors and exciting new capabilities, Clarion – which lists prestigious names like Woolworths, British American Tobacco, Chevron, Daimler Chrysler, Levis, Tiger Brands, Parmalat and Brand House among its clients – recently unveiled a new corporate image.

The new Clarion logo is made up of three interlinking rings in different shades of blue, each representing the various printing processes (digital, screen and litho) available.

'The modern design and typeface signifies a new creative energy at Clarion but also reflects a calm work environment where work is managed, with a cool head,' says Loughton.

The Clarion team looks forward to an exciting year with the injection of new energy from management and advanced capabilities thanks to its recent equipment acquisitions. ✕

## Steve Loughton – dedicated to printing for decades

**I**N 1975, as vice chairman and then chairman of the South African Screen Printing Association (SASPA), managing director of Clarion Printed Products, Steve Loughton was instrumental in reconstituting the association. Under his direction, SASPA became an international member of Screen Printing Association International (SPAI), which is now known as SGIA Screen and Graphic Imaging Association.

Learnerships were developed and the South African Printing Union was persuaded to include the screen-printing employer bodies and to recognise them more formally. Loughton, who began a career in printing in 1964, has seen many changes in the industry in South Africa and can lay claim to 'mothering' many of the local printing companies that spawned from the ranks of Clarion over the past thirty years. He is particularly proud of this fact, and is even more proud of the close association and friendships that have endured the many ups and downs of the industry.

When asked what he believes the most significant change has been to the printing industry over the years, Loughton has no hesitation in pronouncing this to be computer technology and its integration into the industry. Computer technology, he says, has grown the market and has brought about huge improvement in quality, particularly in the design and prepress side, and has significantly reduced delivery time.

Married to Di with three children, Tim, Caroline and Katharine, and heading towards semi-retirement, Loughton spends as much time as business allows on a round of golf at Steenberg Golf Estate, where he lives. ✕



Steve Loughton, managing director of Clarion Printed Products.