

Pratley replicates its famous suspended bulldozer stunt

Celebrating its 70th anniversary, the Pratley Group earlier this year marked the occasion by replicating its memorable launch of Pratley Wondafix in 1985 which saw CEO Kim Pratley stand underneath a 13-tonne bulldozer, hoisted and held aloft by a crane, attached to two plates joined by the adhesive.



Group CEO Kim Pratley

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The company replicated the death-defying stunt at the group's head office in Krugersdorp. "I will still gladly bet my life on the quality of our product," Pratley affirmed before the event.

The formulation of Pratley Putty in the 1960s not only put the company on the global map, but even in outer space, as the product was used by NASA as an adhesive on the Ranger Moon Module Project in 1967. The group currently has over 1,000 products in its stable, and 350 global patents.

Mining operation

The group's ongoing success, according to Pratley, is also due to its total control of the manufacturing process. It even runs a mining operation to produce Perlite and Clinoptilolite (zeolite) using proprietary minerals-processing technology. These ores form the basis of a range of highly energy-efficient mineral-based products, for a wide range of applications from ultra-lightweight concrete screeds to thermally insulating plasters, pollution-control, water treatment, swimming pool and pond filtration, and even agriculture.

Pratley Electrical manufactures and distributes hi-tech cable glands, electrical junction boxes, and a range of accessories, while Pratley Analytical oversees a micro analysis division that supplies the mining and general industry with sample analysis. “In all honesty, given our size – and we are a relatively small group – our contribution to the intellectual property of South African industry is unique,” Pratley notes.

“In order to achieve this in a South African context, we pretty much have had to do everything ourselves. Hence we make every single thing we produce. This even extends to the design of the bottle and the nozzle used for our Superglue, as well as all of the associated tooling,” he highlights.

Family-owned business

The fact that the Pratley Group has remained a family-owned business is also an important part of its success, says Pratley. His son, Andrew, joined the group in 2005 after completing a degree in information technology, while youngest son Charles joined in 2009 upon completing his mechanical engineering degree.



Charles and Andrew Pratley

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“Corporate culture is under-valued globally, with insufficient attention paid to its impact in financial analysis, for example. This has been one of our defining strengths over the years.” He adds that one of his personal highlights as CEO has been the large number of people who began working for the group, and who have subsequently retired successfully.



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Looking to the future, Pratley stresses that the group’s strategy is to respond appropriately to volatile market conditions. Being involved in mining means it also needs to be sensitive to the issues surrounding legislation and regulation in this critical industry. “While on the one hand companies cannot be cavalier about taking risks, they cannot grow either if they do not. Managing risk is therefore very important, and means striking a balance between financial responsibility and growth.”

“Our growth has been bolstered largely by our R&D drive, which consistently produces patented products. Every time we bring out a new product, it is the most exciting moment for me,” concludes Pratley.

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