

## An entrepreneur dedicated to the success of the independent

### What is a typical day like for you?

Is there such a thing as a typical day in this industry? No two days are the same and every day brings new opportunities and new challenges. The only constant is change! Actually there are a few things that I do every day that are constant. I wake up every day with the most beautiful woman in the world and we normally begin the day praying for each other and our family, our businesses and any other need we feel burdened for. A typical day begins with fellowship with my wife and almighty God. From there... anything could happen.

### Tell us about your family.

I have three sons, a stepson and a stepdaughter. From this I have seven grandchildren! I am most certainly blessed to have such a loving family and we are intimately involved with each other's lives. My three sons are in the business with me and thankfully have different skills that together give me great comfort and confidence in a great succession plan. I've always said to them: "Don't come and be in this business if you don't love it," and each one is doing what they love.

### How would you describe your philosophy in life and at work?

Why would they be different? Can one have one for life and one for work? I have only one – to live life as God would desire me to live. I'm guided biblically. It affects every part of my life – my interactions, how I behave, how I treat others and how I expect to be treated. Sometimes, no often, I may fall and fail, but not getting up is never an option.

### Tell us about your retail journey.

My retail journey began in 1980 when I was employed by a business called Shield Multitrade, which today is part of the Massmart Group. At the time it was owned by four dynamic entrepreneurs specialising in offering the independents wholesale and retail group buying and limited marketing. Here I developed a love for the retail and wholesale entrepreneur. In 2000, I decided to go on my own and develop the buying concept into a business that provided a full offering to these men and women equal to the support any group would get from a 'head office'.

### Who are the people and/or events that have impacted most on your career?

Theo Muller, chairman of Shield, Sid McGlashan, a great mentor in relationship management and Ahmed Goondiwala – all three were founding directors of Shield. And also the independents themselves. These are men and women who build great businesses from nothing but a dream, and some not even a dream but the necessity to feed their families. There are men and women out there who are as smart as any leading listed company CEO.

### Describe your leadership style and how do you put that style into effect?

We have a mission, vision and written values in our business and I live every day driving these home to our team. When a business has buy-in from the players and participants, leading is easy. And our achievements are based on where we want

to be, never comparing ourselves to a previous year or to competitors. Our goal is not to be the best in the industry, but to be the best we can be. That makes us the best in the industry.

### Last year you commented that the independent retail market is under siege as it poses a threat to major local retail chains. Could you elaborate?

It is such a pity that our government knows so little about the strength of these entrepreneurs. They live under the misconception that when a major chain buys a successful independent that the consumer will benefit from more competitive pricing. What a lie they believe! It is these very independents that keep the prices down. Once they are gone, we are left in the hands of businesses that are driven by shareholder value. Big chains over the past 10 years have taken out so many family entrepreneurs and the Competition Commission until recently just let it go on and on. When will it stop? When government realises that the small family business is the backbone of any economy. Are we under siege? Most definitely. Something has to give, hopefully it will be legislation preventing this kind of dominant behaviour.

### Describe the UMS business model?

We are a business that provides a full service to the independents. Business plans are done for each and every store with the same mission at hand. My question at the end of each year to each manager in the field is, how is this store better than last year? What have we done to make it better? We are far more than a buying group and we should not even be discussed in that mould. The difficulty is to get suppliers to stop comparing us with standard buying groups. Our model is unique in every way, providing suppliers with business to business marketing and communications and our members with a wide variety of services designed to build every area of their business. We do not believe any independent should walk alone but we encourage them to allow us to partner with them. Suppliers' wealth lies in their brands and we effectively enhance their own endeavours to build the brand through innovative communication vehicles.

### What external factors are currently impacting on the Unitrade business and how have you responded?

There's discrimination in supplier activity due to pressure from the majors. We handle this with each individual supplier concerned. Economic issues and strikes etc, we handle as well as any other group would... we tighten our belts! Dealing with the poor is sometimes so sad. Higher transport costs, the credit crisis,

electricity tariffs etc. all drive the poor into problematic lives. We pray for sanity in our already stressed economy.

### UMS recently formed a partnership with global retail alliance group IGA – what was it about IGA that resulted in the decision to cement the relationship?

IGA provide the only online training facility for independents in the world. Their entire curriculum has been adapted to suit our local marketplace. They also provide us with the latest retail trends and skills development for managers and owners. Independents that have gone to these courses have returned only to turn their businesses upside down and within two years enjoyed phenomenal growth. Their community marketing programmes have resulted in our members becoming far more innovative.

## Bonus Question

### Bonus Question: Tell us one thing that people don't know about you?

I've been invited to participate in the EY World Entrepreneur Award\* and have been accepted in the "Master Entrepreneur" category.

The other thing people don't know, is that I can sing!

*\* The EY World Entrepreneur Award recognises the contribution of those who motivate others with their vision, leadership and accomplishment. Nominees are grouped into four categories: Lifetime, Master, Exceptional and Emerging entrepreneurs.*

