



Craig Hexter

National Sales and Marketing Manager, sia Abrasives

AS SIA ABRASIVES CELEBRATES ITS FIRST ANNIVERSARY AS PART OF BOSCH POWER TOOLS, WE CATCH UP WITH CRAIG HEXTER AND DISCOVER THERE ARE MANY FACETS TO THIS HIGHLY PROFESSIONAL AND DRIVEN BUSINESSMAN.

NCR: By way of introduction, tell us a bit about yourself, who you are and where you've come from.

CH: I was born and raised in Melbourne, in a small family. My mother was my inspiration with her absolute drive, raising myself and my older sister alone, working many jobs and

ensuring we never went without. She encouraged me to pursue a trade, so I spent my secondary education at a technical school, learning all about sheet metal and how to protect it – first with abrasives, and then with paint! However, I was committed to my education and decided not to pursue a trade but to finish my VCE.

A lasting memory from these formative years was the frequency of the question: "Wow, how tall are you?" At 200cm, it is still a rare occasion when I am able to eyeball someone, or even have to look upwards. However, for those who do know me, it is no big deal – unless, of course, I am sitting in front of them at one of your symposiums! Given my height, I thrived playing many competitive sports. Basketball became my main focus. I played five times a week for several years, culminating with playing for the Melbourne Tigers franchise before succumbing to a shoulder injury.

Anyway, back to business.

Following VCE, I further studied business management at Chisholm Institute while beginning my career in the retail hardware sector, initially with the Mitre 10 Group and later, with Bunnings. In both businesses, I further developed my skills and interest in paint and paint systems, running their respective paint departments.

I was approached by the Dulux Group to join their Trade Business and held various roles, including managing a Dulux Trade Centre, before moving to the commercial and industrial business supporting our major construction customers and finally rounding out my career at Dulux in their retail business, with responsibility for the Bunnings account. After 8½ successful years with the Dulux Group, I accepted a National role with Bosch's Power Tool division.

NCR: So, tell us about your time at Bosch Power Tools?

CH: Interestingly, I joined the Bosch Group in 2007, the year before we acquired sia Abrasives. Since that time, Bosch has invested in multi-million-dollar production and conversion facilities to ensure we produce the most consistent and highest quality abrasives.

It very quickly became evident that the values held by the Bosch Group aligned strongly with my own personal values and that this was an organisation that I would work hard for every day. In particular, as one of the world's largest private organisations with 94% of capital held by a charitable foundation, Bosch thrives through entrepreneurial freedoms that allow

Craig Hexter.

significant investments into making our world a better place.

I was the Division's National Key Account Manager for the first six years of my Bosch career, looking after independent trade and retail hardware. I also had the opportunity to travel the world benchmarking various business models and go-to-market strategies.

In 2013 I was offered a country role in Myanmar, which unfortunately coincided with a time of great political unrest and a pregnant wife, so we decided against making that move. I was subsequently offered the New Zealand Country Sales Director role and jumped at the opportunity to grow and develop the New Zealand market for the Power Tools Division, predominately by bringing emotion to the brand. In 2016, we moved back to Australia when our second daughter was born.

NCR: So, how did you find your way into your current role and what are your primary responsibilities?

CH: On my return to Australia, in addition to my main role as National Sales Manager Power Tools, I was involved in delivering several strategic projects to drive business transformation. Some challenging

times in the sia Abrasives division, and some internal movement, created an opportunity to bring a fresh sales and marketing approach and so I took up my current role in 2019.

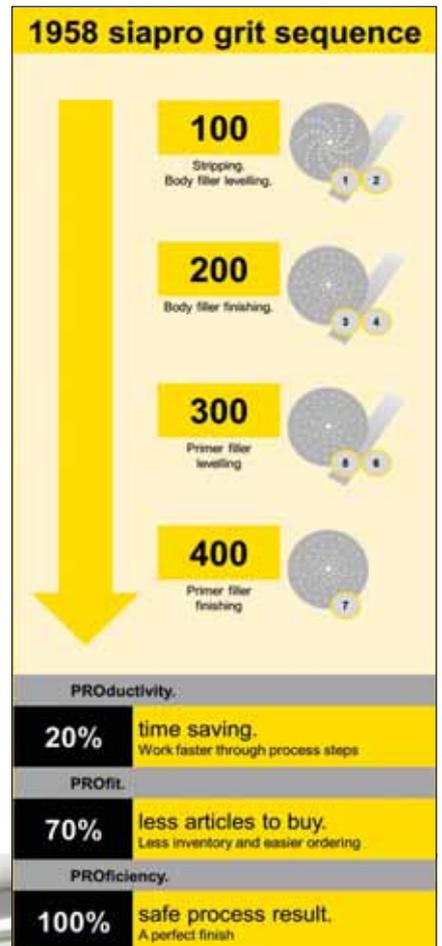
Having total responsibility for the operational performance of sia Abrasives, one of the first things I did was to access current market data, evaluate past decisions and ultimately write an entirely new strategy for the business. In support of the strategy, I reorganised the business and appointed key people to the key roles required to execute the plans.

Some of the key initiatives were to relocate our conversion operation from a boutique plant in Rowville to a \$20m state-of-the-art facility in Poland and move our warehouse from Rowville to a larger, more advanced facility in Dandenong. I also took my entire sales and marketing team to Europe for an intense week of training and facility tours to ensure we all fully understood and appreciated our value proposition.

NCR: What can distributors expect from the 2020 integration with Bosch Power Tools?

CH: sia Abrasives, as an organisation, has benefited greatly in the past years from the above-mentioned

investments in advanced production and conversion facilities. Further improving ease of ordering, faster delivery of orders, AI-enabled order processing and our unique B2B portal



Inside the fully-fitted repair facility.



for our distributors, all reduce our customers' costs of doing business.

We are now in a position to offer a much wider product range than ever before, effectively becoming a one-stop shop, where we can continue to focus on helping our collision repair shops and distributors with solutions to improve output, increase profit and grow market share.

The end user, of course, also benefits by not having to shop around looking for different ancillary products, tools and abrasives when they can get them all at Bosch and sia Abrasives authorised distributors.

As a major sponsor, we are also looking forward to the Panorama Symposium where we will make further announcements, so I encourage body shop owners to come along and see what else we have to offer.

NCR: Now, sia Abrasives appear to be going from strength to strength – what do you put this down to?

CH: First and foremost, people. People come first, and the results will follow. I know this is often cited; however, I truly believe in empowering, coaching and entrusting the right people in the right positions.

Secondly, and without divulging too much, I can say that as a team, we focus on the end user. We have built a completely new purpose by which we live every day. We have fun, celebrate our successes and encourage each other to fail. I believe that if we don't fail sometimes, we aren't trying hard enough. We have a fantastic team and rely on each other in all sorts of ways.

We also have a crystal-clear marketing strategy underway; however, much of this is commercially sensitive. Suffice to say, increasing our brand awareness through emotion-based marketing has been a key component of the strategy. Telling the industry about our technically advanced products is where the real opportunities lie, and our investment in motorsport is just one aspect of this approach.

NCR: How does sia Abrasives differentiate itself in the collision repair sector?

CH: Innovation, quality and

consistency for both the distributor and the end user.

However, you may ask what it means to have an organisation such as Bosch in your corner? Well, when things go wrong, as they do, you can rely on us to be there and help. This is where a big brand and global powerhouse really comes to the fore.

A key value, which originated from our founder, Robert Bosch, really says it all: "I would rather lose money than trust". At Bosch, our Swiss and German quality standards, processes and procedures are world-leading, which are self-evident at all our global production facilities.

We have a vested interest in the automotive industry and, as we are all too aware, we are an organisation that is built on people and trust.

NCR: What are the key challenges and opportunities facing your team?

CH: Let me sum it up like this: we had a clearly defined go-to-market strategy prior to the onset of the pandemic. However, the world has changed significantly in the past 18 months, which has created both challenges and opportunities. It is more important than ever before to make your organisation easy to do business with, to have a seamless online facility and to be able to deliver to the customer with the least amount of effort.

At sia Abrasives, our platform and systems are backed by Robert Bosch GmbH and I would encourage our distributors to take full advantage of

the strength of our global network.

This, of course, helps lower customers' operating costs through streamlining the ordering and logistics process and reduces wasted effort and resources, which can be used elsewhere in the business. In our case, it frees up our people to focus on more value-adding activities. Everyone wins.

NCR: And on a more personal note, what do you do when you're not working?

CH: Although I have historically travelled quite a lot, reporting through Germany and Switzerland, in addition to my Australia and New Zealand responsibilities, I really do love spending time with my family and friends at home. Small home renovations and even building several new homes has kept me busy over the years and for fitness, I enjoy running, gym, and dare I say it, watching the Melbourne Football Club!

NCR: And a closing comment for our readers?

CH: We at sia Abrasives have rapidly evolved in the last two to three years and our entire team is focused on adding value to our distributors and end users' businesses. I encourage anyone who's looking for more information on how we can help with solutions that deliver your orders faster and more accurately to reach out to any of our team or our fantastic distribution partners.

Discover that we really do bring value to the surface, as one team, with our customers.



The awesome sia ute.