

# Leadership

FOCUS



Renee Keeble,  
Managing Director of  
SA Commercial Direct (p.78)

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# SA Commercial

SME outpacing the giants



*Renee Keeble, Managing Director and co-founder of SA Commercial (Pty) Ltd*

Recently, issues around business and gender disparity have been getting more exposure. The traditional profile of the typical business owner has been kicked to the kerb. Business ownership is no longer an exclusive reserve for the tough-talking, masculine percentage of the population, as the number of powerful female business owners and leaders has been steadily on the rise. Astute, driven, ambitious and highly competent, Renee Keeble, managing director of SA Commercial Direct, is part of the growing breed of these tenacious women.

Born with an entrepreneurial spirit, Keeble always dreamt of running her own business. "I always knew I would have my own business one day; there was a burning desire inside me and it was just a matter of starting at the right time," she explains.

She began her career with one of the largest international financial services companies and then moved into direct marketing 13 years ago and eventually managed the direct marketing division nationally. "At the time, direct mail was a strong focus, but in 2002 we started moving into the contact centre and telemarketing space and very quickly realised the impact of this channel – and I fell in love with the industry."

Keeble had worked at her parents' business as a teenager before, and picked up some of the essential skills needed to run a successful business.

In January 2007, she founded SA Commercial Direct, armed with only her personal savings in the bank, pure determination and the will to succeed. The company's growth far outstripped expectations and within six months of operation, the business had to move from the Cape Town southern suburbs to the central business district, where they developed a brand-new contact centre.

"Our first signed contract came from a client who knew me by reputation and trusted my



capability," Keeble says. "This speaks directly to one of SAC's building blocks of ensuring strong, lasting relationships, a key discipline we continue to practice amongst our management team," she adds.

The SA Commercial group has two different entities: SAC Financial Services and SAC Direct.

"I am very involved in our business from operations through to client management. The more I understand about our business, our clients strategies and the industries in which we operate and link this to the external environment the better I am able to successfully adapt to the changes and create a business that will last," Keeble explains.

SA Commercial Direct essentially provides business process outsourcing and contact centre services. The company focuses on enhancing customer experience through strong customer engagement programmes. In essence, the company provides the important link between a business and its clients.

"Many companies are beginning to see the benefits in staying connected with their customers. Too often we focus on growing sales, and too little time and investment is spent on retaining our customers. This is where SA Commercial provides strong customer contact solutions throughout the customer life cycle," the dynamic MD explains.

SA Commercial has a 300 seat capacity contact centre and services various corporate clients across different verticals from Financial Services through to Retail, with a strong focus on enhancing customer experience and delivering operational cost efficiencies."

Keeble feels SA Commercial's advantage as a family run business brings a great deal of trust and commitment to the quality of their business output.

"By providing the flexibility and speed to implementation, as well as superior end-user experience has resulted in high client retention, increased loyalty and great return on investment for our clients. We have deliberately used our size to our

advantage, specifically to address the age-old challenge of offering a personalised service," she says.

SA Commercial Direct recently won the BPeSA (Business Process enabling South Africa) Industry award for Best Outsource Contact Centre – SME. Keeble attributes this achievement to her dedicated team who have an overwhelming sense of unity. "The creation and implementation of our strategy at SA Commercial has been a true team effort and we try and involve all our staff in contributing towards strategic business development and growth opportunities – enabling us to create a healthy method for positive change," she says.

She believes a successful business does not need to have thousands of employees, but rather a strong reputation of being its clients' most trusted partner. "The 'pursuit of excellence' lies in exceeding our people, our clients and our own expectations," Keeble notes.

One wonders if the savvy businesswoman has not encountered any difficulties in a male-dominated industry. Instead, she feels that being a woman is actually a distinguishing factor that sets her apart from the rest. She has never had a door slammed in her face because of her tenacity and the reputation of excellence that has been preceding her business.

"Women in South Africa are being recognised for the fact that they bring a great deal of skill to the business situation as well as diversity, and these factors are very valuable in today's business environment. Initially this was a stumbling block, but with time my reputation in the BPO (business process outsourcing) sector has grown and made my interactions a pleasure," Keeble explains.

SA Commercial has been doing its part to empower women and harnessing their talent, as a staggering 50% of the company's employees are black women.

True to her strong nature, Keeble walked from France across the entire northern Spain (800 kilometres) in 2011 – in what is known as the Camino de Santiago journey. Reflecting on this journey of enrichment allowed her to

## Fast facts

- 2005 SA Commercial Financial Services is started
- 2007 SA Commercial Direct takes off
- 2008 Receives Santam shares in the Emthunzini BEE Business Partners trust
- 2008 Finalist in 'Best Outsource Contact Centre' awards
- 2011 ISO9001 Accredited
- 2011 Enterprise Development partnership formed with Aegis BPO South Africa, part of the \$27 billion Essar Group
- 2012 Wins Industry Awards - Best Outsource Contact Centre (SME)
- 2012 Implements ISO27001

live another life just for a while and she walked away with great gratitude for the little things in life. Her drive to never give up pushed her to complete that journey and reaching a clean state of mind and soul made it all worthwhile.

"In our business, everyone knows interacting with me means we should speak in 'solutions mode'. One should never give up. The minute we start thinking about giving up, it's a recipe for disaster," Keeble says.

SA Commercial is one of the few SME BPO operators in SA and prides itself on delivering high-performance service. "We have invested consistently in business practice improvement since our existence and today find ourselves in an aggressive market. Locally there is a need to implement competitive strategies within our organisation to ensure we are the destination of choice based on quality, talent and our strong reputation as a centre of excellence," Keeble says.

She aims to always maintain a fine balance between life and work. "The challenge is ensuring my work does not consume too much family time," she says. Keeble is married and has two adult children. ▲