



By Ntanga Mojapelo
Photos ABB

On progress and paper sacks

Robot speeds up Nampak's sack-packing process in South Africa

> Progress. This is the meaning of Nqubeko, the name that a Nampak Sacks employee gave to an ABB robot installed at the company's paper sacks plant in Durban, South Africa.

The installation came as a result of management's idea to automate their production equipment a few years ago. Two members of the production team were sent to Amcor, Nampak's packaging industry peer, in Australia to investigate the sharing of best practices to make the initiative a success.

"We saw the need to automate our processes in order to ensure that we remain competitive in our industry," says Tim Elliot, Managing Director for Nampak Sacks.

After researching the technology behind Amcor's robotic solutions, the team came back to South Africa with new ideas and a technical brief for a supplier up to the challenge.

ABB South Africa grabbed the opportunity and completed the initial development of the robot cell in 2005.

"Designed around two machines, a key feature of the ABB design is its ability to service two paper sack tubing machines while the Amcor equivalent was only capable of servicing one machine at a time," says Elliot.

The robot, an IRB 6650 with an IRC5 controller was installed in the Nampak plant in January 2006 and the team has since seen tremendous improvements in the factory.

"Our production capacity has increased to 350 sacks a minute, which equates to 2 million per week and 94 million a year," says Elliot. "We have now redeployed the staff that used to perform the manual

labor to another part of the factory, accelerating the efficiency of our processes."

To welcome the new member of the production team, the company ran an internal "Name the robot" competition last year, which resulted in the robot being christened Nqubeko, which is a Zulu name meaning "progress."

"With our leading experience in robotics solutions, we are confident of being able to help Nampak with their needs," concludes Helberg. ☺

The paper sack palletizing line, above. Production manager Steven Knowles of Nampak Sacks below right and Johan Helberg of ABB, bottom left.

>FACTS

About Nampak Sacks

Nampak Sacks is South Africa's leading supplier of multi-wall paper sacks and self-opening bags, for cement, staple foods, agricultural produce, pet foods and industrial products. Owned by the Nampak Group, the company produces in excess of 190 million sacks and 600 million bags annually. Read more at www.nampak.co.za.



Benefits of the IRB 6650

- Production has increased, with 350 sacks a minute produced, equaling 94 million sacks a year
- Works with not one but with two machines, providing flexibility and increased output
- Staff redeployed so they can perform other needed tasks at the company