



Game Lusaka A Massmart Africa success story

Massmart operates stores in 14 sub-Saharan African countries, and last year one of these - Game Lusaka - outperformed all others to achieve sales figures of over R300-million. This success was the result of the store team's determination to match relevant local knowledge with comprehensive retail expertise.

Customers queuing at Game

At 9am when the doors open, around 250 customers are queuing to get inside the store. "This is actually quiet for a Thursday," says store manager Rashid Abed. "That's because it's right after Christmas, but it'll pick up. Wait until you see how many people will be here by month-end." Game Lusaka is Massdiscounters division's top performing store. The promotional goods these customers are queuing to buy, in this case washbasins and laundry baskets, are stocked by the hundred. Within two hours, the first batch of 300 washbasins will be sold and the display area replenished. By closing time, sales of basin units will reach 600.

"No other store in Lusaka has the queuing we get on a Thursday for our specials," says Abed. "It's a real phenomenon." Top priority for Abed and his team is ensuring they have the right stock in the right quantities for this 4 500m² store.

After working together for four years, Abed, the store's merchandise manager Simeon Kaunda, human resources manager Kenani Kombi and administrative manager Mweemba Gamela know what it takes to ensure the right goods are marked at the right price to draw shoppers. "Lots of consultation is needed here," Abed says.

"In short, you have to be able to mix local demand with your own retail expertise."

Being relevant in the market

One of Massdiscounters division's policies for operating stores in countries outside of South Africa is to employ at least 90% local people at the stores. Expatriate managers may get new outlets up and running, but these employees are gradually replaced with local talent. Today, only eight of the 12 stores run in other sub-Saharan countries utilise any South African employees. Brian Maseko, trainee floor manager and buyer for locally procured goods at Game Lusaka, says sourcing local product is key to being relevant in local marketplaces. Because he knows what his customers like, he knows what to buy.

Liquor, a category of goods Game stores don't sell in South Africa, is sourced by Maseko for the Lusaka store. There are other local favourites brought in too, he says, "like some chocolates, biscuits, bath foam, body lotion and Zambia's famous Mosi beer".

Mixed in with this local flavour is Game's service offering. To ensure Game employees' advice is of genuine value to customers, individual product knowledge training sessions are held for staff



Game Lusaka management team (from L to R): Mweemba Gamela, Simeon Kaunda, Rashid Abed and Kenani Kombi



members every Tuesday. "Here in Lusaka, you can't just walk into any store and find good service from knowledgeable salespeople," says Maseko. "Our team members here at Game, however, are able to convincingly explain the pros and cons of products in various categories, and this results in sales. It's important that we get everyone possible to come listen at these sessions. If for some reason the person responsible for a department is not available, any one of us can assist a customer and answer questions."



Game in Africa: a short history

Although it is the division's most profitable store, Game Lusaka was not its first outlet beyond South Africa's borders. "As far back as the late 1980s, Game had recognised the retail market potential of our neighbouring Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries," explains Ray Anandavasagar, Africa development executive at Massdiscounters. "The first Game store was opened in Gaborone, Botswana in 1993. This was followed by Windhoek, Namibia in 1996 and a further three stores in 1999. Six more were opened periodically until 2007 and today there is a total of 12 Game stores across 10 countries outside of South Africa."

"The Game Africa business model has been continuously refined and improved, but continues to remain true to the fundamental Game strategy and business philosophy," says Anandavasagar. "A customer walking into a Game store in the heart of South Africa will find the same shopping experience and store presentation at any other Game store on the continent."

"Currently the sub-Saharan Africa focus is to double, if not triple, the number of Game stores in

Africa within the next decade," says Anandavasagar, "Like Game Lusaka, our top performing store at the moment, all our Africa stores are run by passionate teams operating in countries with growing economies and a hungry consumer base previously starved of formal retail choices. We've learned that the fundamental global principles of consumerism and supply and demand apply regardless of the country or city. So long as there is aspiration and a good degree of disposable income, the opportunity for a retail choice like Game exists."

Rewarding hard work

"The final important key to Game Lusaka's success is the way in which we motivate our team," explains Game Lusaka's Abed. "Our staff earn competitive salaries, they share in the rewards the store earns when we reach our targets and Game contributes to employees' pension funds. Being incentivised like this makes a big difference. In fact, 60% of our staff members drive to work every day in their own vehicles."

"For me," says merchandise manager Kaunda, "I've been with this store since it opened 10 years ago." Kaunda is a relative of the late Kenneth Kaunda, founding



president of Zambia. While dedicated to seeing growth and development in his country, the younger Kaunda chose employment in the formal sector rather than a career in politics. "Since I've been working in retail all my life, I guess that makes me a career retailer," he says. "I chose to work with Game Lusaka before it even opened because I had read quite a bit about retail best practice and wanted to see it for myself. I'm still with Game today because it's been such a success. It's good to be part of a success story." ■



Brian Maseko, buyer for locally-procured goods at Game Lusaka, holds one of the store's most popular items: Mosi beer.