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Passion and Professionalism

Since launching four years ago, Action Drill & Blast has developed a strong and dedicated team of professionals who are committed to their clients' needs.

Images by David Phillips

With more than 300 professionals working at diverse sites across Australia, Action Drill & Blast has a firm foundation for growth and development. Serving the civil, mining, and coal sectors, the company utilises this deep well of expertise and experience to ensure it delivers projects safely, on time, and on budget. In a competitive industry, the company's cohesive team is known for its unyielding passion and professionalism.

One man who understands this dedication well is Action Drill & Blast's General Manager Warren Fair. He joined the company when it first began four years ago, and he's been instrumental in transforming the business into a prominent player in the mining industry.

When taking the reins of Action Drill & Blast, Warren was tasked with taking the company to a \$100-million turnover in three

years. He met that \$100-million target in just two years, making Action Drill & Blast Australia's fastest-growing blasting and drilling contractor. According to Warren, at the core of that success is the company's commitment to its clients and its staff.

Warren recently met with *The CEO Magazine* to discuss the development of Action Drill & Blast and its relationships with staff, clients, and suppliers.

***The CEO Magazine:* What prompted you to establish Action Drill & Blast four years ago?**

Warren: I've been in the industry for 28 years. Twenty-one of those have been in the drill and blast industry. In 2010, the company I was previously working for was acquired by its largest competitor. The parent company of Action Drill & Blast, which is NRW, decided to start up a drill and blast company; a few of my colleagues and I took up the

opportunity to build a business from scratch.

We effectively started with nothing four years ago and now we're turning over more than \$100 million each year, with more than 300 people working all over Australia. The timing was in our favour. Those were the days when the boom was still happening, production was being ramped up everywhere, and people were looking for good drill and blast contractors.

On one hand, it'd be nice to just put it down to the fact that we're good at what we do; but on the other hand, we had the advantage of being in the right place at the right time. We are good at what we do, and part of that is that we've got experienced people, have the latest technology gear, and we've made sure that we've got good systems and processes for our people.

We approach things professionally, we listen to our clients, and we >

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- Warren Fair

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respond to their needs rather than telling them what we think they want to hear. We just do a good job. A lot of our guys, all they've ever done is drill and blast; they're specialists. Drill and blast is all we do—we've got to be good at it.

How do you reinforce your strong client focus throughout the business?

We reinforce this in a couple of ways. Internally, we have a values program where we make sure everybody understands what our values are, which are safety, integrity, teamwork, and innovation. We make sure all of our managers understand that, and they use those messages when interacting with clients.

In terms of making sure our clients are aware of how we approach things, a lot of it is based on just doing what we say we're going to do. We make sure that if we make a commitment, we keep it. That gets through. Eventually people say, "Yes, we can rely on Action Drill & Blast. We can trust them. We can go home at night knowing that our drill and blast is being taken care of." That's very important to us.

I've heard that one of your key strengths is the professionalism of your team and the passion they have for what they do. What's the secret to embedding that within the team?

I think it's our culture, and it's making sure that we're attracting the best people. When we have our management conferences and seminars, we might have 20 or 30 people in the room, and I say to them, "Guys, have a good look around. You are looking at the best group of people in your field in the world. If you aren't the best at what you do, then there's a good chance that there's a person sitting next to you that is." I truly believe we have the best.

*"Tricon Drilling Solutions have forged an outstanding working relationship with Action Drill & Blast over the past several years, growing from ad-hoc job status to sustained contracts. Above all, we are impressed with their professionalism and ability to communicate and deliver."
- Adam Lewis, Direct Sales WA, Tricon Drilling Solutions*

We've assembled an extremely good team. We motivate them by making sure they know they are part of the whole team, not just their crew. We're very interactive, so if people have good ideas we're keen to hear those ideas and introduce them. We're certainly not egoistical enough to say we know everything. Even at the shop-floor level, if a guy's got a good idea then we encourage them to tell us. They're the guys that are doing the job, so they're the ones that are going to know how to do it better. We're really attracting good ideas from everybody at all levels.

What improvements have you made in safety and technology over the years?

We're an innovative company, so anytime we see something go wrong within the industry or if we have an incident, we make sure that we thoroughly review it and see what we can genuinely do to improve the process.

For example, we have a device called an ANFO hopper, which fits on the front of an IT loader. Prior to the ANFO hopper existing, when we were delivering explosives to the hole on contours we had what we called a bucket brigade where people would be carting 20-litre buckets up and down the hill. If you're working on flat ground, you can just do all this with a truck. When you're on a bit of a hill, you're relying on personnel to physically walk up and down the hill with buckets in hand and tip the explosives in the hole. So you've got potential ankle injuries and all sorts of manual-handling problems.

However, if you introduce an ANFO hopper, which sits on the front of a loader, then the loader can just be driven up and down the hill and directly deliver the explosives into the hole with very little manual intervention. We've looked at the issue of how do we stop people hurting themselves, and we decided to get them out of manual tasks. This is just one >



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How do you work with partners like Tricon Drilling Solutions and Mincon Rockdrills to ensure the best outcomes for all in these high-pressure situations?

We're obviously very reliant on making sure that we have the right tools for the project. Tricon and Mincon are two companies that help us do that. If we're working in particularly difficult, hard, or even very soft ground, then we've got to make sure that we've got the right drilling tool for the application. We work with companies like Tricon and Mincon to make sure that we've got the right device, and as a result we get better productivity, lowered costs, and we can in turn pass those savings on to our clients.



How do you ensure strong communication and collaboration between your team and the teams at Tricon and Mincon?

We've got constant ad hoc communication. Tricon and

Mincon will visit sites frequently, and we'll make sure that we have regular monthly meetings to catch up and exchange stories. They're both very proactive, so if they think we can do something better, then we work together to see what we can do about it.

Where do you see Action Drill & Blast going down the track?

Our growth has been very good to date. We've grown from nothing to a \$150-million turnover as of the end of the financial year at June 2013. It won't be quite that in 2014, as I guess we've been a victim of the downturn, but we're still doing all right. We're still looking for growth in future years. While we're heavily focused on the coal and iron ore sectors at the moment, we're looking to target the gold producers in and around Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, and the base metals producers in the Mount Isa region.

We're also looking to expand our footprint internationally. We're currently looking at Africa and South America, examining what we can do with our current skills base in different commodities and different regions to continue to build the company

We're a passionate company. We love doing what we do, and we're

very focused on our clients' needs. We like to work with our clients at the inception of their project to make sure that they're really asking the right questions of any contractor. So, even if we're not successful, at least they can approach the project with views on how it can be done as cost effectively as possible. I guess that's where the industry is at the moment; it's all about making sure you can do it cost effectively.

In terms of cost effectiveness, we have very good relationships with our key suppliers. I don't think cost effectiveness is necessarily about asking everybody to take margin out; I think it's about looking at how we can do the job more efficiently, with less of something—less explosives, less drill bits—and how can we approach the job so that we're being more efficient with the equipment that we use. I think it's a holistic approach of making sure you don't leave any stone unturned. •

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