



**MARC STERNBERG » SPARK ATM SYSTEMS**

## PASSION, INTEGRITY AND EXCELLENCE

How one bright idea sparked success.

FROM BEING DUBBED 'Marc the Spark' as a child to naming his multi-million rand business Spark ATM Systems, founder and managing director Marc Sternberg walked away with the overall coveted title of 2011 Entrepreneur of the Year, earning himself R100 000 in grand

prize winnings to grow his business further.

Like every good story, it has to begin somewhere and for Sternberg, it all began in the land down under – Sydney, Australia, where he lived with his wife Tanya. "We were on a visit to Cape Town in 2005. I was at a restaurant with my family and could not find an ATM nearby to draw cash," he says. "At the time, I was employed as general manager for Vodafone Retail. My wife and I were considering returning to South Africa, but we had not decided what to do business-wise when we returned."

Sternberg, who was keen on starting his own business, was aware how sparse access to cash and banking services were in South Africa, and how big convenience ATMs are in developed countries such as Australia and the US.

"I set about researching the convenience ATM market and then proceeded to travel the world, speaking to ATM deployers, researching hardware suppliers, systems, switches, banks, and all aspects related to setting up a convenience ATM network in South Africa," he explains.

### SECURING PARTNERS

The two most important business partners that Sternberg secured for the company were Chungho Comnet in Korea as the hardware supplier, and Capitec Bank as the local banking partner. "I persuaded investment banker Russel Berman to come on board as sales director, and we started trading. Spark grew fast as customers and potential customers soon realised what an important gap in the market our ATMs were filling, and the benefits the product and concept offered merchants," says Sternberg. Technical, financial, sales and support staff soon followed and Spark quickly grew into the company it is today – employing around 80 staff across South Africa, and with a footprint of 1 500 merchant-filled ATMs countrywide.

### DRIVING VALUES

Passion, integrity and excellence are company values that drive the business. "Giving access to cash and banking services to South Africans, often where banks do not, while at the same time benefiting the merchants who host the ATMs, makes all of us at Spark feel great about what we do," says Sternberg. "Another big factor for us is the exceptional customer service we offer. It has become something we are renowned for. If I've learnt anything over the past five years, it's that you need to make sure you start or run a business based on something you are passionate about. And never forget to put your customers first," he says. □

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