

## **New solar distributor brings innovative thinking to local markets**

New solar systems distribution company New Age Solar Technology Environmental Projects (NASTEP (Pty) Ltd) is aiming to take the South African market by storm, Managing Director Theo Rautenbach says.

“The South African market needs an educational mind-shift in order to start considering solar technology not just as a commodity but as an absolute necessity - and not only from an energy crisis point of view. Taking advantage of a resource such as the abundant sunlight South Africans enjoy just makes more sense,” he explains.

NASTEP has obtained distribution rights for the Himin range of solar products in South Africa until 2010 and the rights for the rest of sub-Saharan Africa on a first right of refusal basis.

Rautenbach tells *Plumbing Africa* that NASTEP was born as a result of current NASTEP Africa MD Nico van Wyk’s investigation into the solar market as a new venture. He identified Himin as a viable solar manufacturer and after a visit to the company’s factories in De zhou China, he secured the exclusive distribution rights for the company’s products in Southern Africa.

“At that stage, Eskom was conducting various workshops and holding talks with various solar companies and we saw an opportunity to enter the market,” Rautenbach says.

“After the energy crisis hit in 2008, the solar industry saw an incredibly steep growth. For example, in the beginning of 2008, South Africa had about 10 registered solar companies, today that figure is close to 200. NASTEP distinguishes itself in this group by its association with Himin, which currently is one of the largest solar product manufacturers in the world,” Rautenbach states.

The company is able to produce around 3 million solar geysers a year, and can supply the South African market with 80 000 geysers a month.

NASTEP’s marketing strategy revolves around bringing the Himin solar system to the whole country. “We looked at the South African environment and agreed that it is much more difficult to cover the country than it would be in, for instance, a European market, simply because the country is so large,” says Rautenbach. “Therefore, NASTEP’s strategy is to divide the country into 19 regions, 10 of which are in Gauteng and the rest are spread out over the country, franchising the business. We have already sold 14 of the 19 regions, and we are expecting the rest to follow soon. In the mean time, NASTEP is also focusing on the rest of Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean islands. This marketing initiative will be managed by Nico van Wyk as MD of NASTEP Africa,” Rautenbach says.

With reference to quality and standards, Rautenbach says that NASTEP has already successfully submitted the vacuated tubes of the Himin solar system to the SABS for testing. He says that during the next few weeks NASTEP will also be submitting selected models of the solar geysers for the full SABS mark. In the meantime, the Himin photovoltaic products carry the European TUV mark and the geyser heat collectors the German DIN mark. In addition, Himin's geysers also comply with the ISO 9001: 2000 standards and they have recently been awarded the European CE mark.

Rautenbach believes that NASTEP has three main advantages in the market. "The first is the high level of quality that NASTEP is able to offer," he says. "The Himin system has a five-year guarantee but some of the first systems that were installed by Himin fifteen years ago are still operational. " The second is the exclusive agreement that NASTEP has with Himin to supply the solar systems, and thirdly, the franchising option gives NASTEP the opportunity to cover the whole country in one network and provide a comprehensive service accordingly."