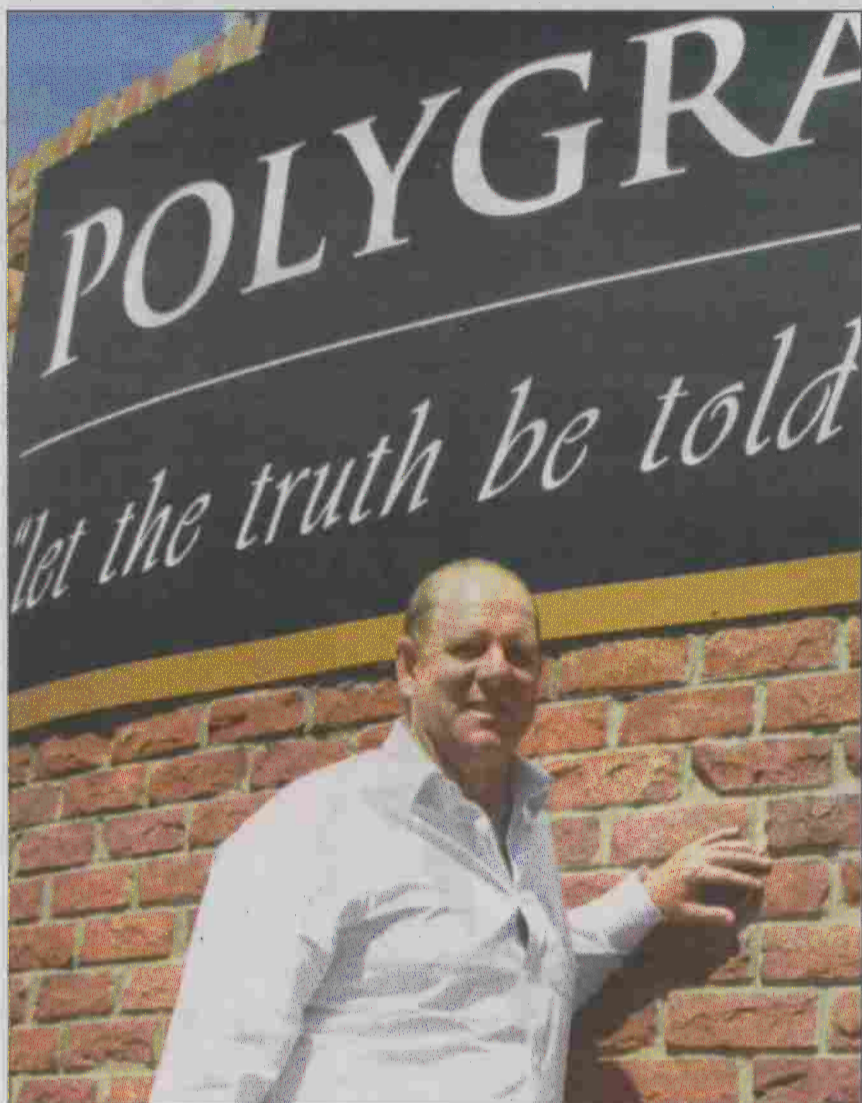


Super-snoop to the rescue



Reg Horne, managing director of Justicia Investigations... businessmen are reluctant to use cameras or bring in agents.

Policeman-turned-private investigator has fine track record of saving companies and jobs, writes **Shirley le Guern**

THE main threats to a business were external 20 years ago. Now most of the risks are within a company – crimes are committed by staff or outsiders colluding with them. Reg Horne, managing director of Justicia Investigations, has tackled a broad spectrum of crimes since leaving the SA Police Service in 1992 to start his own company.

These include insurance scams, car theft syndicates, stock theft schemes and pilferage. The last is the most common, with the risk greatest in goods receiving and dispatch. Often trucks are overloaded and the surplus is sold en route.

One human resources manager, he says, charged casual staff "R100 a week plus a Coke" to ensure they kept their jobs. Another manager helped himself from a store and put big boxes on shelves to hide the gaps.

While being interviewed, he dispatches agents to back his polygraph team. Two of the three staff polygraph tested for a client failed.

"Many people don't use an organisation like this because there is a lot of mistrust of private investigators. Businessmen don't know their rights to protect assets. They are reluctant to use cameras or bring in agents to infiltrate their organisations," he says.

Smaller businesses generally turn to Justicia only when things are dire and they are about to close. "In our game, intelligence is power. The ideal approach is to infiltrate the company, gather information and evidence and build a case. Where there isn't time, we have to start with a polygraph test and build the case backwards."

In 20 years Justicia has grown into one of SA's biggest private detective agencies, with offices in Durban, Joburg and Cape Town. It has three arms: Justicia handles polygraphs and hi-tech information-gathering as well as providing undercover agents and forensic services; Guarding SA provides security guards; and the WhistleBlowers fraud and crime hotline service operates internationally.

Horne tries to steer clear of domestic disputes. "These are usually very emotional. You have to be careful not to get involved in a family feud."

He says clients need to be clear about what they want to achieve. Will it be a criminal case? Will it go to the Industrial Court? Do they simply want to root out and get rid of the staffer with his hands in the till? He and his experienced team (most are ex-police officers) can then identify what evidence is needed.

He admits opening a business to help other businesses was not easy for a policeman who knew little about how business worked.

As a police detective in the field, tasked with investigating and gathering information to solve priority crimes in high-risk areas, much of his work was community-based. Charging a fee for a similar service took some getting used to.

"Since we used informers with success in the force, there was no reason that couldn't work in business. We realised there was a market for help-

ing business owners look after themselves."

After quitting the SAPS, he teamed up with an emerging security company in which the core business was guarding. The company was getting requests for covert investigations. So a symbiotic relationship developed, though the two companies operated independently.

A milestone was achieved with the creation of WhistleBlowers 12 years ago when the Protected Disclosures Bill was under discussion. This offers a platform for employees to anonymously report dishonesty at all levels within an organisation.

The first independent operation of its kind in SA turned into a 50-50 partnership with auditing firm PriceWaterhouseCoopers.

"We sent in a former MK cadre and ex-special branch policeman. We told workers that if these two could trust each other enough to work together, they could trust us to solve crime and protect their jobs," he says.

PriceWaterhouseCoopers has since left the partnership to avoid a conflict of interest and WhistleBlowers has grown to the point where it serves companies internationally and has a second call centre operating in India.

Horne says SA's political dynamics have changed. Given greater pressure for good corporate governance and ethical operations, Justicia's approach is usually educational.

This is particularly important because of the recent emergence of the trend of crimes of desperation rather than of greed which predominated a few years ago.

He says some people have a desperate health situation or need to support orphans or family affected by poor health.

And growing numbers of employees are stealing to support drug or gambling habits.

He says what starts with taking one or two items is noticed, spreads, and leads to a culture of dishonesty.

Horne says there are three legs to protecting a business: physical measures to protect it from the outside; clandestine measures, such as investigations, the use of electronic technology and forensics; and building the right culture.

The gate guard who waves out his truck driver buddy in an overloaded vehicle protects nothing. Expensive CCTV camera equipment is equally ineffective when the guard who is supposed to keep watch is asleep.

Horne says statistics show that, on average, a quarter of staff are inherently dishonest, just as many would never cross the line and the rest could go either way, depending on organisation culture.

He practises what he preaches. "The culture in my organisation is honesty and integrity. Being honest with our clients and ourselves and upfront about what we can offer is what has kept us here."

He strives to sell solutions rather than products. "We sell the most effective means of resolving a problem. We weigh up what to do with a client – we usually go with his gut feel and more often than not he's right."

Justicia's experienced detectives are well aware of the pitfalls of certain actions and steer clear of transgressing labour legislation. "When you take a case, you have to be open-minded and go and see where the weaknesses are. You don't start pointing fingers and accusing people. There is a fine line and issues have to be handled professionally," says Horne.

That said, how does a troubled business owner find the right investigation agency? Horne says he wouldn't use the Yellow Pages to find a specialist.

"We have a lot of personal referrals. There is immense satisfaction in knowing you've saved a business and the livelihoods of the workers."



Horne... often needs to start with a polygraph test and build a case backwards.

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