

# THINK BIGGER

Young, dynamic and passionate about transformation, Ntaba Phili is geared to take the property industry by storm with the launch of his restructured business, NAPD Holdings.

**N**taba Phili is one of those charismatic '30-somethings' that leaves a lasting impression after first meeting him. His enthusiasm, creativity and down-to-earth approach to people are evident in everything that he does. Recently, Phili took his company, NAP Designs to the next level by ring-fencing the services he offers to clients under investment, development and design – all within the umbrella company, NAPD Holdings.

Since NAP Designs was formed in 2002 the company has continued to evolve in the property sector – a result of Phili's flexibility and visionary approach to business. In a recent interview with *JFM Transport Facilities* he shared with us how he cut his teeth in project management while working on the redesign of Mafikeng Airport. He also shared his future vision for NAPD Holdings and the importance of building relationships with facilities management (FM) companies.

In a nutshell, this dynamic businessman has high ambitions for his newly-formed company to participate in the transformation of the property sector and for life in general.

## Starting off

Phili pursued a studying career in science, graduating from the University of Cape Town with a BSc in chemistry. While in his second year of studies, he won a

scholarship from Caltex and worked at the company's refinery for a year and a half on completion of his degree. "But, I realised what I really wanted to do was to interact with people a lot more," he says.

From Caltex he joined Unilever for two years, undertaking industrial marketing in the chemical industry. "My role there was more marketing- and business development-orientated – visiting clients, finding out about product usage and liaising with the technical services teams."

And, then he moved to Eskom, where he first worked for advisory services (consulting with clients regarding energy-efficient technology and reductions) and then for the parastatal's pricing and policy division. From Eskom, Phili joined Transnet, focusing on marketing, business development and customer service once again.

"My role was to ensure that service from within the company was consistent and if it was not, that people had the channels to communicate with the organisation and to resolve their problems." He was instrumental in setting up a call centre for the organisation.

## Emerging dream

It was while working at Transnet that Phili first started playing with the idea of going into business on his own. It was, however, something that he approached step by step and systematically, researching options,



As a people's person with a strong vision, Ntaba Phili is full of dynamic aspirations for NAPD Holdings – his company that recently underwent restructuring.

# NTABA PHILI

By Nicola Theunissen



Space solutions developed for Mafikeng Airport



NAP Designs was involved in the redesign of Mafikeng Airport. As the company's first real redevelopment project, it was a challenging, yet exciting project to be involved in, says Phili.

evaluating what he had to offer business-wise and talking to a lot of people and mentors.

But, why choose property and design? "I looked at a couple of options, and what I knew was that I had a passion for people, customer service and creativity." Earlier in his life, while renovating one of his own properties, he did a crash course in design. "I wanted to add a more professional flair to the renovations, and I have always been interested in the creative side of design and construction."

Coincidentally, Transnet moved offices while he was at the organisation. "It was a chaotic exercise. The furniture arrived in dribs and drabs; the carpets were still not laid when

we arrived. I started approaching the whole move from a space planning perspective. I realised that there were companies that were doing this professionally, and I also realised that I could have done the job a lot better had I been contracted to do it."

Slowly, the idea started to take shape. The property industry is creative, it's also technically challenging and it requires a lot of interaction with people. Within this framework Phili registered NAP Designs in September 2002. One month later he secured his first relocation contract and continued to do relocation and interior design projects throughout 2003.



Ntaba Phili,  
owner of NAPD Holdings

Nicola Theunissen

## Mafikeng Airport – a learning curve

“So, for the first year, everything was about interior design, focusing on the aesthetical side of things,” imparts Phili. Within the following year (2004), the company was approached by one of NAP Designs’ furniture suppliers that had been asked to get involved in the refurbishment of Mafikeng Airport. Because the company was a supplier it referred the job to Phili and his team, who took on the challenge wholeheartedly.

NAP Designs acted as the project owners with regard to the refurbishment. “We were slightly unprepared for this project. It was our first real redesign. Up until then we had done relocation and interior design and the coordination of those, but they did not involve the full scope of project management.” A professional team was put together, and NAP Designs monitored the status of the project by means of regular meetings with the client and the professional team. NAP Designs also did the interior redesign work as part of the professional team. “We wanted to do it this way. We purposefully chose to get involved and to be hands-on in order to learn. It was the perfect opportunity to cut our teeth in the full spectrum of the property chain. We saw the big picture.”

## Airports – unique design requirements

The redesign of the airport was a lot different to the commercial properties that Phili worked on prior to the project. “What I liked about this project is that airports are very much like mixed-use developments. You have offices and retail, and then you also have specific aviation requirements, such as ticketing and baggage handling, and all of these front-desk type situations. You have to be cognisant of people’s movement in terms of your space planning. You also need to allow for spaces where people can relax. Airports are extremely multi-dimensional.”

In terms of space planning, a case in point is the retail component of the airport. “When we looked at the retail side, we had to evaluate how we could best prepare the shops without necessarily having tenants. We had to prepare the spaces so that when tenants were acquired, they would be usable – they needed to be flexible and to allow for multi-usage. We also had to look at the type of businesses they were trying



Photographs by NAPD Holdings

### Space versatility

**A key trend in space design, which is driven by cost limitations, is designing adaptable spaces, tells Phili. This was the case with the redevelopment of Mafikeng Airport. According to Phili, one has to be cognisant of people’s movement and allow for the multi-usage of retail outlets in the spatial design of airports.**

to attract.”

Phili says that the project was challenging, but also immensely satisfying. “It was the start of the change from interior design and the aesthetical side of things to project management and redevelopment. From the airport’s redesign onwards, we started to become more strategically involved in projects.”

### Bigger slice of the pie

“The vision to provide a turnkey solution to clients started to emerge,” Phili imparts. The second project in which NAP Designs was involved in on a development basis was the establishment of a head office for the National Prosecuting Authority in Kimberley. A property owner was

**“At least 50% of the work we have received, to date, has come from FM companies”**

approached by the client to help it search for offices in Kimberley. A building that was previously occupied by the Department of Roads was secured, but the client wanted a complete redesign.

“We came in to redesign the building to the clients’ specs and to work together with the property owner to deliver a solution for the client. Typically, the property owner only pays for the tenant installation and the client pays for the bulk.”

It was in this process that Phili had another light bulb moment. “The property owner buys the building for, say, R15-million. He secures a 10-year lease with the client and we come in and do a R5-million renovation. It’s a R20-million project, but



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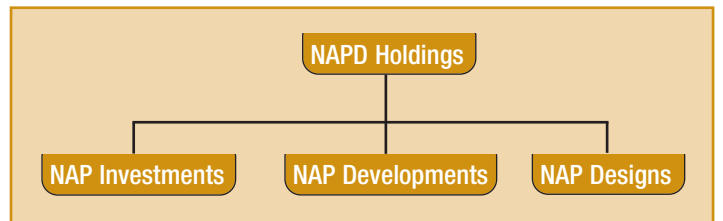
Photographs by NAPD Holdings

we are only participating in the R5-million part of it. I realised that we were locking ourselves in to only operate in the R5-million redevelopment. We gained project revenue, while the owner gained annuity revenue over a period of 10 years.”

This was when the flame for property investment was ignited. “But, it was still early days – late 2005. I started to give it some thought, but I didn’t take any action just yet. It was only in 2008 that I said to myself, ‘okay, now I need to start making plans to move into that direction.’”

### Restructuring time

The idea of NAPD Holdings grew out of the fact that NAP Designs was already offering a dual function to clients: interior design and project redevelopment. Coupled with Phili’s vision for property investment, it was time for a restructuring process. So, NAPD Holdings was formed in November 2009. It comprises three entities: NAP Investments, which focuses mainly on property acquisition and ownership; NAP Developments, which focuses on new developments and existing redevelopments; and NAP Designs, which focuses on the aesthetic interior design of new and existing projects. Through this business model, NAPD Holdings will be able to provide a full turnkey solution to clients, Phili enthuses.



### FM symbiosis

- 1 According to Phili, the major challenge regarding the FM market in South Africa is the fact that it’s dominated by a handful of big players.
- 2 Phili notes that smaller players are capable of handling soft services, such as cleaning and catering, but that they often struggle with the hard engineering skills. Even if they have the technical skills, they lack the capacity.
- 3 Phili sees FM companies as a strategic partner and platform to provide business to and gain business from in the future.



Photographs by NAPD Holdings

## FM companies – strategic partners

With Phili's strong focus on collaborative relationships and partnerships, he says that FM companies will play an important role in the company's future strategy. "When it comes to FM, we will be using the formula of collaborative relationships, where we bring strategic FM partners within the company and offer this service to our clients as a package, or alternatively, if the client wants to appoint a different company, we will be flexible and hand over the building to the FM company that will be managing the building in the future," says Phili.

"The relationship with FM companies has always been important to us, because I would say that at least 50% of the work that we have received, to date, has come from FM companies. And, since we are becoming a property owner, these are relationships that we want to nurture."

## Developing smaller players

According to Phili, a major challenge concerning the FM market in South Africa is the fact that it's dominated by a handful of big players. "And, I don't think that this is changing," he imparts. "The smaller companies can deal with soft services, such as cleaning and catering, but they often struggle with the hard engineering skills. Even if they are technically capable,

**"Going forward, we intend to interact with as many FM companies as possible"**

they often lack the capacity. Big companies have a whole team that specialises in lifts, for instance. The smaller ones don't have that."

Since he is passionate about transformation (on the basis of adding real value and delivering a quality service to clients), Phili informs that NAPD Holdings wants to interact with the smaller FM players and uplift their skills and hone existing capacity in order to start delivering to the market.

"Small also means flexible, and that's a benefit to us. Often the larger companies are not interested in smaller projects, as they think that there's nothing in it for them. The smaller companies are creating more options in the chain; they are stimulating the market."

He concludes that the relationship the company plans to form with FM companies is one of mutual beneficial status and symbiosis. "I'm finding that a lot more clients are starting to realise the need for FM and starting to understand what FM companies do and who they are. Going forward, we intend to interact with as many FM companies as possible. We see FM companies as a source of business, but we also see ourselves as a source of business for them."

## Keep evolving

Phili says he is motivated by adding value and making a difference. "I like

## Gearing up for take-off

- 1** NAP Designs was formed in September 2002 and was restructured into NAPD Holdings in November 2009. It was launched at the African Union Buildings in Sandton.
- 2** Through its new business model, NAPD Holdings will be able to provide a full turnkey solution to clients, Phili enthuses.
- 3** Phili thrives on adding value and seeing direct deliverables – unlike the tedious and time-consuming processes often associated with corporate life.

to feel that the work that I am doing is adding value to the people that I am involved with. I like to see that progress is being made and that we are achieving results. That's important," he says, jokingly adding that this was probably one of the main reasons why he changed from being a "corporate animal" to heading up his own business.

And, that's where he is now. It has been seven years since he took the leap of faith and he is as optimistic about the future and as ambitious as ever. ■