

Water crisis can be good for business

By [Taschica Pillay](#)

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As the water crisis intensifies, South African companies are working furiously to meet demand for smart water restrictors. Durban-based Utility Systems, which has supplied the Cape Town municipality with about 300,000 devices over the last 10 years, is now producing 35,000 water management devices a month.



The company, which developed their first device in a garage, has close to 1.4-million of the devices connected around the world, including parts of Africa, South America, the Middle East, the Far East and New Zealand.

The water management device is a remote communicating electronic water control valve. The smart meter allows water flow limitation and is able to provide prepaid water metering, automated meter reading and leaks and tamper detection.

Managing director Peter Rodseth quit his job as a lawyer to invest in the device proposed in the mid-1990s by a client.

"I liked the idea, invested some money and commercialised it. It was the first prepaid water system in the world. Initially it was used as a prepaid system, but that business was sold off in 1999. I then started this business in 2001. Initially prepaid was not widely used here but in the last 10 years it has taken off. The whole world is moving towards smart meters. Water is a huge focus globally," said Rodseth.

"We supply about 60 municipalities in South Africa. Cape Town is our biggest customer, with Durban not far behind. We are building 35,000 devices a month and want to get to 100,000 capacity to meet the growing orders," he said.

He said the company's team of engineers continue to work on improving the product to make it adaptable to different climates and radio frequencies.

Rodseth said the device has been used as a flow limitation device for consumers who are in arrears.

"It was a way to restrict consumers' consumption and is now being installed at more homes, especially in Cape Town, to get consumers to bring their consumption down due to the drought," he said.

Xanthea Limberg, Cape Town's mayoral committee member for informal settlements, water and waste services and energy, said there were currently about 231,000 water management devices installed across the city.

Limberg said it also served as an early warning system for leaks on a property.

"The city also makes use of the device when restricting customers due to unpaid accounts, and provides it to indigent customers to help them avoid finding themselves in debt. Although every programme has its challenges, the water management device is an integral part of the City of Cape Town Water Conservation and Water Demand Management Strategy. This strategy was internationally recognised for its success at the 2015 C40 Cities Awards, where it was acknowledged as the best in the world in terms of preparing the city for the possible challenges of climate change," said Limberg.

According to management of iLembe District Municipality, in northern KwaZulu-Natal, 21,821 of the devices have been installed in the region.

"The municipality is currently conducting an assessment which will inform whether or not more similar devices should be installed bearing in mind that some areas within the district currently have limited water supply.

"Implementation of credit control processes by blocking consumers from purchasing remotely by percentage proportioning between consumption and servicing historical debt has yielded positive results both to the municipality as well as to the consumers. This also assisted in curbing perpetual consumer debt increase."

Edwin Sibiya, chief executive of Pretoria-based company Lesira-Teq, who design, manufacture and supply smart metering systems globally, said smart metering technologies can make it possible for entities to achieve a lot more than just collecting revenue.

"It is the first step towards achieving control of consumption and builds a strong sense of conservation with end-users. The technology ensures data integrity and they can monitor and manage their water and electricity spend."

Among Lesira-Teq's products is the water management unit, which converts mechanical piston meters to smart meters and the water management device.

"It has the ability to set daily or weekly or monthly water or gas or electricity consumption limits with penalty warnings. It can detect a possible leak and burst pipe with automated notification," said Sibiya.

Sibiya said they supply corporates and private companies, gated and complex communities, utility management companies and municipalities.

"Because the water management device and water management unit technology is fairly new and was officially launched in July 2017, we are in discussions with various municipalities. Sales have been primarily in the domestic market with over a thousand sold. Most municipalities make use of our prepaid water meters. To date we have supplied and distributed more

than 800,000 units," said Sibiya.

Source: The Times

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