

COVER STORY



HINO

A significant purchase of Hino trucks recently led us to talking to Treescape. In talking to their operations personnel, we found there is more to the company which meets the eye and at the same time, we gained a healthy respect for a Kiwi company's ability to learn from the past to build a better business in the present and the future. We also saw just how important it is for vehicle suppliers to meet or exceed their customer's expectations, with this story especially being a true demonstration of, 'if you snooze, you will lose.' Treescape is a growing company, ready to embrace new technology if it is presented properly and with the advantages to Treescape demonstrated acceptably. Hino seems to have gotten it right...



Treescape voted Hino with its chequebook



Hino hits new heights with **Treescape**

TREESCAPE IS A SPECIALIST

company which deals with vegetation and the art of arboristry, which may not be a real word, but you get the idea – the company deals with trees.

Dealing with trees is actually quite a significant industry, requiring a significant fleet, which Treescape has. Before we delve too deeply into it however, here are some things about Treescape which you may not have known.

A long-standing New Zealand company, Treescape has recently branched out into Australia – if you'll excuse the pun – and is currently showing massive growth across the Tasman.

Treescape's local growth is more sedate, the result of company's recovery from the GFC, which took its toll on a significant number of Treescape-sized businesses in this country.

So exactly how big is Treescape? Employee numbers are in the region of 400 Trans-Tasman personnel, annual company turnover is up around the \$20 million mark with a healthy – and appropriate level – of capital expenditure for plant and equipment.

Given Treescape's national presence in New Zealand, the figures are not so astounding, but for those who might have seen the occasional Treescape-branded vehicle in passing, you may not have realised the full size of the company – it's much bigger than one or two trucks, and a digger or two!

Treescape's professional/environmental credentials include ISO 14001, TELARC, and EnviroMark NZ recognition, which should speak clearly to the subject of good business practice on Treescape's part.

From the company's 'acorn days' 30 or so years ago, Treescape blossomed as the building and forestry industries

boomed and everything seemed to be tracking up.

The company went from strength to strength, showing consistent growth and profitability...then when the effects of the GFC hit, well, it's fair to say Treescape was a very tall tree in a violent storm.

Fortunately, Treescape proved to be more willow than oak, weathering the economic decline and learning from the painful experience of too much enthusiastic growth.

Treescape's silver lining from the GFC storm was the lessons learned about controlled growth through effective management practises, sensible – if slightly reserved – purchasing decisions and a general cutting away of some dead wood in preparation for sowing the seeds of smart organisation.

At one time, Treescape's fleet policies seemed to reflect a business where success has come too quickly. As a result, decisions were made which perhaps should have required more controls. These are now in place and going a long way to ensuring Treescape's ongoing growth and success.

Take, for example, the recent purchase of seven Hino trucks – a decision based on price, ease and efficiency of maintenance, fit-for-purpose considerations, sound business relationships and yes, environmental consideration.

Well, this last had to be there, didn't it? Treescape is an environmentally focussed company after all, dealing as it does with trees, vegetation and related products and services.

But to get back to the vehicle assets, of which there are more than just a few.

Treescape's policy is to own its vehicles rather than lease them – another lesson learned from the past – which gives Treescape complete control of



Box bodies are the most common fit-out for the trucks

its vehicle and plant assets, from initial ownership to vehicle disposal.

Vehicle ownership also allows Treescape to pick and choose its vehicle suppliers based on the company's direct experience with a given provider, and once the decisions are made to go with a specific vehicle provider, there has to be a very strong case made to change.

Hino, by virtue of the brand's ability to offer an excellent initial buy price, made a great first impression on Treescape's operations director Brandon Whidett.

The responsibility of looking after the finer points of 'Hino-ising' the fleet was then delegated to Dion Wright, operations coordinator and fleet manager by default.

First impressions are one thing, but it was going to take more than these alone to sow the long term seeds of a professional relationship with Treescape, as Dion explains:

"Pricing is our prime motivator for vehicle or asset buying," he says "with a good focus on the vehicle or plant equipment being able to do what we need it to.

"Equally important to us is the professionalism of the supplier. We have had some issues with various suppliers in this regard previously and we haven't found this to be the case with Hino. In

fact, from a professional standpoint, our Hino contact, Lyndon, has done a very good job of looking after us.

"Our vehicles work to a largely seasonal schedule," elaborates Dion. "We place vehicle orders based on our busy season which tends to be summertime.

Trucks have to be ready to go for that season or else they start costing us, which we have discovered is not just undesirable, it's unacceptable. We haven't had any delivery issues with Hino."

But what does 'ready to go' actually entail?

Treescape's fleet and asset list is long and diverse with specialised equipment being added to vehicles, which are guaranteed a pretty hard life. As such, the vehicles have to be solid and reliable to begin with, before Treescape's engineers get to them.

Once the vehicles have been delivered, they are fitted out according to their role within the fleet. This might include GPS and comms, a little outsourced storage system supply and fit and ultimately painting and signage.

As to the hardcore stuff, Treescape handles its own bodywork and fabrication in-house – much like the rest of the company's fleet management practises.

Part of Dion's role as Operations manager was to orchestrate Treescape's

national network of fabrication workshops, where you'll find mechanics and fabricating engineers to handle Treescape's specific engineering requirements, carry out vehicle service and maintenance.

Box bodies are the most common fit-out for the trucks, but you can add to this the fitment of insulated booms with working platforms, tipper units, bladed systems including the awe-inspiring tree spades, and more besides.

In addition of course, Treescape has other vehicles on its books, including utility vehicles – Toyota HiLux's exclusively – tractors, excavators, side-by-sides, fork-lifts, there's even a Prius hybrid in the fleet mix.

And speaking of hybrids, in addition to demonstrating the advantages offered by its conventional trucks, Hino also introduced its hybrid truck to Treescape, and today, there are three of them within the fleet.

"It's early days to start talking about reliability, longevity and other aspects of the hybrids," says Dion, "but we have been getting good feedback from the drivers who like them, and there have been some significant fuel savings reported."

The return on investment realisation is hard to quantify in the first few months



Treescape owns its plant and vehicles

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of ownership, but it will be interesting to see whether the hybrids remain an ongoing part of the Treescape fleet-scape. Dion says there's no reason so far for this not to be the case.

Part of Dion's role is of course, the eventual disposal of vehicles at the end of their working life. To date, he has not had too many issues with this, with buyers staying in touch and keen to pick up a pre-loved 'Treescape special.'

"We don't seem to have the same ability to move Hino's on as we do other brands," says Dion, "which could be a reflection of Hino's presence in the market to date. The trucks aren't an unknown quantity by any

means, but the company needs to establish the product's reputation better."

"Our drivers like the Hinos and our mechanics reckon they're easier to work on, reducing their out of service time – this is a strength the company can and should promote.

"As far as customer service and satisfaction goes, we were impressed enough with Hino to vote with our corporate chequebook and they delivered on time and with good product."

Combine this with the hard life expected of a working Treescape vehicle and Hino's ability to provide suitable vehicles, and there's not really much more to say. **CA**

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