

BUILDING ON DIVERSIF



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OVERSHADOWED BY THE MINING BOOM, THE CRANE TRUCK SEGMENT HAS GROWN TO BECOME A SIZEABLE MARKET IN ITS OWN RIGHT SINCE THE START OF THE DECADE – SPAWNING A NEW ENTREPRENEURIAL GENERATION THAT IS HAPPY TO SEIZE AN OPPORTUNITY WHEN THEY SEE IT. Story and images by Peter Armstrong

The crane truck segment is often overlooked when road transport is on the agenda, but it is an area bustling with activity and filled with business savvy. In Queensland, the industry has become more and more competitive due to the State's on-going emphasis on infrastructure and mining development; creating a host of business opportunities for those willing to invest into the right equipment.

One such person is Fred Mohammed, head of Crane Trucks R Us (CTRU). A plumber by trade, Fred has set up multiple businesses in the past, from plumbing and printing to transport and driver training. He has not always seen himself as an entrepreneur, but when reflecting on his career in the transport industry, it becomes obvious that there is a large portion of savoir-faire involved. Fred began trading as Hypo Couriers in 2001. Having expanded the business, in 2009, he rebranded to Crane Trucks R Us. After losing a contract and having six excess trucks at his disposal, he saw an opportunity to provide specialist transport services for steel reinforcing. This led to his first major project on the Airport Link Tunnel – and the rest is history.

Today, CTRU's core business is providing crane trucks for wet and dry hire. The company's services extend to heavy

haulage, steel and reinforcing materials, timber, machinery and warehouse equipment lifting and relocation, but slowly expand into other areas as well. For instance, Fred is also providing skills training, line haul services, warehousing and storage – knowing that diversification is key to be less vulnerable to economic volatility.

corporate mantra of 'approaching each project from the customer's point of view' – providing a variety of choices to ensure there is no compromising on anything, as Fred puts it.

This outlook on business has seen the company grow from one Hypo-branded rigid truck in 2003 to the CTRU fleet we know today, supported by branches in

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Regardless of the application, however, the key to success is having the right equipment on hand, Fred says. Covering a wide range of possible applications, the CTRU fleet consists of more than 200 pieces of equipment – including both rigid and semi-trailers equipped with cranes that offer a wide variety of reach and lift capacities, all operated by staff with years of experience.

According to Fred, there is a variety of makes and configurations to choose from – including Isuzu, Hino, MAN and DAF in the rigid line-up, while prime movers are mainly B-double rated Volvos, with the odd Kenworth and Iveco in the mix. The highly diversified fleet reflects CTRU's

Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Darwin. “Having family in the crane truck business in Sydney, I initially put a driver in the truck and ran the business from Sydney,” he says, revealing that the company's growth story since then is largely based on the ability to adapt and diversify.

“Especially the diversification into project work has been highly successful. Back then, we have addressed an urgent need in the construction industry by delivering specialised transport solutions. Today, we are not limited to construction alone anymore, but also offer associated services for mining and gas construction, industrial, rental and government organisations.

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“We also have the ability to undertake heavy haulage and over-dimensional work, offering clients a full range of transport and handling solutions,” Fred says, pointing out that CTRU has been involved in the Gateway and Ipswich Motorway upgrades, the construction of the Darling Downs Power Station, the upgrade of the Amberley RAAF base, the Lotus Glen Correctional Centre and the new Legacy Way tunnel, which is now under construction in Brisbane. Another major project undertaken

was the Northern Busway and Airport Link tunnel, which saw CTRU transport over 350,000 tonnes of steel during the preliminary construction phase – using up to 42 trailers and 15 prime movers on the one job. According to Fred, the \$4.8 billion integrated tunnel and bus way was the largest infrastructure project undertaken in Australia, and CTRU employed a fleet of ¾ cab trucks custom-built to deliver reinforcing steel within the tunnel to ensure maximum manoeuvrability.

The company’s dedication to finding the right equipment for the job has since paid off in more ways than one. After proving its abilities in the initial stages of construction, CTRU was awarded a contract to distribute safety barriers for night work, as well as to control the bulk handling and haulage of oversized precast steel segments and reinforced caging. While CTRU is still benefitting from being involved in prestigious infrastructure work, Fred, ever looking to the future, is already busy establishing new divisions to expand the business in different areas. “We have recently established Tranzhire R Us to provide innovative, cost-effective and high quality transport solutions. It is a hire division offering crane trucks, extendible and flat top trailers as well as prime movers for projects Australia-wide. Our trucks include all-wheel-drive vehicles to cater for severe service and have a variety of Palfinger cranes to



perfectly match the service role,” he says. “We also have a large number of trailers for hire now, and a lot of new ones coming. We use mainly Vawdrey trailers and are ordering them in batches of 10 – including extendibles, drop decks and straight flat tops. I believe having a rental division makes sense in our line of work, allowing our clientele to get involved in wider range of projects.” But, the new division is just one of a whole range of new subsidiaries Fred has established under the Freight Logistics R Us banner – including Warehousing R Us, Linehaul R Us and Skills R Us, a registered training organisation. “We train people in truck driving, obtaining a Blue Card, a crane ticket and a riggers ticket, in fact everything to do with the construction industry, and we are accredited under NHVAS,” he explains, revealing that diversification is the key to success in an uncertain market. “You have to diversify, otherwise your

business is at risk – if you are in one business alone and things go berserk, or a project reaches completion, there is nothing left to do. “That’s why we are not only targeting

FAST FACT
Crane Trucks R Us’ fleet includes rigid trucks, crane trucks, 4x4 crane trucks, 8x8 crane trucks, prime movers, B-doubles, trailers and specialised vehicles.

the mining and construction industries, but [also] offer a wider scope of transport and associated solutions for all sorts of customers. Basically, we are a one-stop-shop for a whole variety of service applications. The idea is to grow our business with a view to the future.” Fred adds. “Customers have been very responsive, even though we don’t even advertise what we do. We are very proud of the fact that we experience a lot of repeat business, and it’s that repeat business which is making rental a necessity at the moment.” Going forward, Fred says the CTRU fleet will increase in line with the company’s growth – even if it is a risk. After all, he was only 20 years of age when he took his first business risk, and it paid off. Now, with more than 80 people employed in Brisbane alone, he is happy to trust his experience. Regardless of how new or old the equipment, presentation is high on CTRU’s



priority list, and each weekend all trucks are professionally cleaned. A lot of the trucks are based at customer premises over the week and signwritten in their livery. On the crane front, CTRU is solely using equipment by Austrian company Palfinger, some of which boasting a reach of 14m.

But again, there is no standing still. Fred says he is currently in the process of speccing a new vehicle to be delivered next year, which will offer even more reach and capacity. Only recently, CTRU also added a host of new rigid trucks with Palfinger cranes to the mix.

One reason why Fred trusts in Palfinger is the brand's proven safety record. That's also why all CTRU trucks are equipped with reverse cameras – something he regards as vital considering how narrow many work sites are.

"Safety is important across all levels of our operations," says Fred. "We have a very good safety record and this is never compromised in any way. Our people work in difficult areas, often in extreme conditions, so it is vital to have a highly professional team and the right equipment at hand."

While Fred says the crane truck industry has become increasingly competitive, he is not prepared to operate at cheap rates to obtain the work. "Some owner-operators do the same work very cheap, but all it does is make them go bust. We are in a niche market that demands a highly specialised service. There are crane truck operators and professional crane truck operators, and there is a huge difference between the two," he says. "The fact of the matter is you have to operate with absolute safety in a highly professional manner, and that includes ensuring maintenance is up to scratch too. Some who are urging into the industry now have old equipment that is not correctly maintained, which means they take risks that should not be factored into any operation. Cheap always comes with grief."

According to Fred, customers want state-of-the-art equipment to ensure maximum efficiency and safety. "Our trucks are equipped to meet those requirements, right down to flashing strobe lights and three-step ladders to make sure drivers can do their job with ultimate safety."

Fred says many of these features have directly contributed to the growth of the business, simply because customers are aware of their value in the total transport package offered. Unsurprisingly, Fred's company motto is 'a symbol of service'. He does whatever he can to be available and add value to customers. His drivers wear the uniforms of his customers, effectively acting as their ambassadors.

"Our business plan is to continue steady growth across all sectors and envisage growth of between 100 and 200 per cent over the next 18 months – and we will achieve that," he concludes.

As a result of these efforts, the company and Fred himself have been nominated for some prestigious awards lately. Last year, Fred was a nominee for the Ernst and Young 'Entrepreneur of the Year Award', and he was also called 'Young Achiever of the Year' at the Victorian Freight Awards. "It is all about working for your customer and delivering the best outcomes possible. Growth is about recognising opportunities and being passionate about reaching goals." 