

Stavros Yallouridis

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MID-WAY THROUGH HIS SECOND YEAR IN THE ROLE, STAVROS YALLOURIDIS SHARES HIS BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSES HIS PROGRESS AS HE TRANSFORMS MTA NSW INTO A PROGRESSIVE AND DYNAMIC INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION.

NCR: Would you tell us a bit about who you are and where you've come from?

SY: I was born in Melbourne of Greek parents who migrated from Egypt in 1956. I grew up in an automobile environment as my father was a mechanic whose first job was with the then Porsche distributor, Hamilton's, followed by a foreman's role with Volkswagen before starting his own business. I essentially grew up in the workshop and was eager to be involved with cars and get my hands dirty from a very young age. My father imported cars and I worked with him in the business until I decided to travel the world.

I commenced my corporate career with Alfa Romeo in 1990 in a technical role at their head office in Milan. I then moved to Greece to run Alfa Romeo's operation, including product and brand-management roles, before being offered the role to run the Greek national sales business in its entirety.

In 2002 BMW knocked on the door and I was offered the opportunity to establish a national sales company in Greece from the ground up.

I brought a broad industry background and international experience to BMW and the start-up experience was invaluable. With the Greek business well-established, BMW offered me the role of Managing Director, BMW Group Australia, in 2008. I decided to leave the company in late 2010.

I went back overseas and spent some time on the family businesses before returning to take up an executive role with Iveco Trucks in Australia and finally, here I am at the MTA of NSW.



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NCR: Your departure from BMW was described as a shock – what were the real drivers behind this decision?

SY: I can understand why the market saw this as a surprise. Things were going well at BMW. We were out-performing our competitors, over-delivering on our metrics and generating solid profit for the group. However, there was a point when we couldn't agree on some matters and I tendered my resignation. This occurred at a time when my father

became terminally ill, so there were other factors in the decision. BMW and I parted on good terms and, as it happened very quickly, there was never really the opportunity to clarify things – we all just moved on.

NCR: Coming from such a strong commercial background, what attracted you to head up an industry association?

SY: I really did take my time with this decision – for that very reason. However, the more I looked into the

association, the more I began to understand the opportunities and challenges that lay ahead. The association was facing a number of difficulties and it was a culture typical of a “traditional industry association”. I saw a great opportunity to bring my extensive commercial experience to the organisation, build on the 108-year heritage and reinvigorate the association. The board was concerned about declining membership, the financial position and the way the organisation had been led.

Our membership is predominately business owners, albeit ranging from small businesses to dealer networks. They require – and expect – a commercially-focused association that can provide the support they need.

NCR: Your appointment has been described as “the beginning of a new era”. What is your vision for MTA NSW?

SY: Following an initial review, it was apparent that the association was hurting in its current format. It was just not generating enough revenue to satisfactorily support the members. It is, of course, critical to first understand the needs of our 28 different divisions, which are quite diverse, to then be able to provide the necessary services. In essence, there are two facets to our vision: one is to provide opportunities and the other is to provide support and protection.

NCR: How would you categorise the key functions of the organisation and how are you developing them to meet the needs of the members?

SY: Taking the vision to the next level, there are several key functions of the organisation that support the vision. There are the forward-looking functions, such as: business advice; employment relations; financial services; green stamp accreditation and communication on the industry and economic environment. As a registered training organisation, we are currently training in excess of 1,000 students throughout NSW and ACT. Our plans are to continue to grow by providing exceptional training programs for all in the industry.

Regarding the “protective” functions, we must always remember that when we provide protection to our



Part of the MTA NSW Management Team.

members (say, driving a change in legislation), this flows onto the industry as a whole and not just for MTA members. It is for this reason that businesses need to be a member of MTA NSW and to ensure that “the voice of the motor industry” continues to be heard. The primary focus is on our members as they are our customers; however, we fight to ensure our members have all the information and skills required to repair a consumer’s motor vehicle the correct way.

NCR: What can you tell us about the culture of the organisation and how you are impacting this critical component of the organisation?

SY: To be frank, I was quite shocked when I first came on board because it was apparent there was a lack of communication within the organisation. There was a culture of complacency, which is not the situation today as we have worked on this from the very first day. To change a culture, we need to work with people who believe in change. People do move on, that is true; however, we have attracted industry professionals who want to be associated with us and drive change in building a culture of success.

NCR: How did you articulate the way you wanted to operate?

SY: As a commercial person accustomed to a competitive environment, coming into a not-for-profit where people thought it was OK not to be making money, it was quite a challenge. Had we been in a better financial position, we

could have taken things more slowly, but the reality was we needed to do things quickly. Communication was the key as without a clear communication strategy you have a lack of understanding and the whole thing falls apart. We were clear, concise and consistent in our approach and we proactively broke down the silo mentality across the business. We really did open the communication channels and we are now beginning to operate as a unified team.

NCR: You appear to have made some changes to the management team.

SY: We have made some changes in personnel, but most of the team have been with us for some time. What we have done is change roles and responsibilities and developed a culture of accountability within the management team. We have added more commercial experience to the management teams across the business, with which comes accountability. Our managers really are being held to account, which was not so evident in the past. We are also improving our skill base to allow us to improve our systems and processes, all of which is geared towards supporting our members. We have a great team at MTA NSW and all of us are passionate to succeed.

NCR: What can members expect from MTA NSW from an innovation perspective?

SY: Innovation for us is doing things differently and leading the way, and here at MTA NSW it’s fair to say we are not reinventing the wheel. We are building a foundation by implementing

leading-edge processes and procedures in an organisation that has never seen them before, such as our new platform that allows our members to order a wide variety of content online. Once we embed this foundation, our intention is to further develop the processes and provide genuinely innovative solutions as we build the core competencies of the association to better serve our members – we are definitely thinking outside the square.

NCR: I see you have spent some time repositioning the organisation with a variety of marketing activities.

SY: When I joined the organisation, it was clear we were perceived as an old, outdated association and the challenge was to update and modernise. We have since rebranded ourselves, created a new logo and taken advantage of our location on one of the busiest roads in Sydney, increasing our exposure with improved signage – we have effectively made our office a billboard and created real presence. We have also made connection with the next generation coming through the industry with our new website and a social media presence. We have fully rebranded the fleet of cars and have a team of training professionals all displaying the brand – we really are much better at marketing ourselves. As we move forward and generate greater revenue streams, we will have more money to both invest in the business and spend on marketing programs that will benefit our members and their businesses. However, you may have noticed the original MTA logo is also on the outside of the building, which we also use when we issue certificates. I am a firm believer in recognising the past and the efforts of our predecessors.

NCR: So, what will success look like to you in say, five years?

SY: For us, success will be three-fold. First and foremost, we will be looking at the trends in our membership and see membership on the rise.

Secondly, we are looking to build on the above-mentioned services, and if we can expand these services to give our members greater options, that too would be fantastic for the association and our members.

And finally, an increase in our presence and improved levels of



MTA NSW HQ.

satisfaction, especially with our younger members, as reflected by our membership surveys.

This is what success will look like to the board, myself, my team and most importantly, our members.

NCR: What do you believe will be the greatest challenges and opportunities for the association?

SY: Two of the key challenges are the skills shortage in the industry and the changing legislation, especially within the body repair industry. We really believe the 21 recommendations for NSW should have been rolled out. We really do need to prepare our association and our members for a future with autonomous vehicles, electrification and a connected environment. What will our future workshops and body shops look like and how do we adapt? As they unfold, we will need to ensure our members have the right competencies to survive and thrive. From my experience, I know there are manufacturers working with governments to analyse what mobility will look like decades from now and we need to keep in touch with developments as they unfold.

NCR: From the perspective of MTA NSW, what do you see as the biggest changes in the industry over the next five years?

SY: The demographics are clearly changing with an increasing number of “baby boomers” who are considering their options, and some will decide to close down their businesses in the coming years. We see this as a real opportunity to assist the outgoing members with their transition, which may include assisting them to prepare

their businesses for sale and perhaps even facilitate the sale.

With the advancements in technology, the next generation of technicians will have a different skill profile and we will play a pivotal role with our training capabilities. Although we have a diverse membership, the majority are small businesses that tend to get left behind. We also see a further opportunity to support our small business membership with business support services to help them navigate the changes.

NCR: And what changes are we likely to see within the association?

SY: We currently have a strong member base, a strong training organisation, and we have those that require business services, such as employment relations. We are looking to expand both in location (where do we need to be?) and in our offer (what do we need to have?). All of this takes time, and as our membership grows and the funds become available, we will roll out our plans. However, we will continue to adapt our plans and change our approach with the changing environment and none of us really know what that will look like.

NCR: And a closing comment.

SY: We really are at a turning point this year. We have implemented several marketing initiatives, we have increased the numbers in our team and we are performing positively, financially. All of this is essential to support our 3,500 members, representing approximately 43,000 employees. It really is a great time to be part of what is becoming a truly dynamic industry association.