

AFRICA **outlook**



A F R O T E Q F M S O L U T I O N S

feature

Specialists

IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Companies become successful when they focus on their core revenue generating activities. However they can become even more successful by minimising costs of non-core activities. In order to manage these functions efficiently to maximise profits requires specialist intervention and know-how.

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Mention FM to most people and they will probably think of their favourite radio station but to Lydia Hendricks, Director of South African-based Afroteq FM Solutions, it means “Facilities Management”, something she’s passionate about.

As a Director of Afroteq FM Solutions, a company specialising in full turnkey facilities management solutions, she has been active in the industry for close on 20 years and is determined to see the industry increase its professional recognition in South Africa. She claims that currently the facilities management function is often perceived as an “in-the basement” function when it should in fact be brought in at senior executive level as it is a key integrator and enabler of the core business strategy and if ignored could have a significant impact on cost and business effectiveness.

To this end, Facilities Management is still undervalued in SA. Hendricks explains that Facilities Management services include approximately 80 different services and if put under one umbrella contribute to one of the highest operational spend for most businesses, and in most cases hidden and in some cases replicated, because the service often reside in each respective department to serve their specific need or the management of the essential services are passed on to Departments such as Human Resources who are not subject matter experts in these areas of service.

“The most critical and risky services are usually executed by blue collar people and hence the natural assumption is that facilities management belongs in the basement, and engaged only when needed,” Hendricks says.

This often leads to costs being expended only when systems fail or damage control applied due to lack of communication and planning. In most cases this approach ends up

costing the business more than it should – “penny wise and pound foolish!”

“Astute businesses outsource their Facilities Management to allow them to focus on their core business,” says Hendricks. “This provides the business with effective service support that can be measured financially and operationally.

“Non-facilities management staff that may have the support of procurement, finance or legal departments of the business, cannot leverage spend as well as FM companies can as they cannot offer the economies of scale. Another benefit of engaging FM specialist allows for staff to grow in their chosen career as those services are the FM specialist’s core business.”

The South African Facilities Management Association defines Facilities Management as “an enabler of sustainable enterprise performance through the whole life management of productive workplaces and effective business support services.”

Read that again slowly and absorb it as you do. FM should “enable” and support the enterprise.

From this philosophy it becomes clear that FM is a strategic function that requires high-level thought; it is as vital to the lifeblood of the enterprise as the procurement plan, marketing plan or business plan for that matter.

An integrated facilities management strategy and plan will ensure the following benefits for business:

- Space Optimization – Space cost Money!
- Reliable Service Delivery and pleasant and effective work environment – retention of key personnel is vital for any business
- Improved company image – Service and business environment leaves an indelible impression on prospective staff and clients
- Reliability of building systems – A business cannot function without core services such as electricity, air conditioning, lifts in a high rise building

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Remove these elements and the enterprise will not reach its full potential and may even collapse.

“You need expert know-how to unlock the hidden costs and enable best practice which can make or break your triple bottom line,” says Hendricks. “We need only look at the current situation of State facilities to understand the consequences of not having a strategic plan for Facilities Management. The same rings true for most enterprises simply because they don’t fully understand the concept and value of FM.”

An interesting story lies behind the success of this dynamic industry leader. In 2009 Afroteq and FM Solutions merged - offering multidisciplinary professional services to the built environment.

FM Solutions, specialists in providing engineering project and programme management services, added their engineering expertise to Afroteq’s success in the facilities soft services industry, Academy and Space Planning and Design and resulted in what Hendricks calls a “good marriage”.

Both companies collectively have 20-years of experience and reside within Arcus Facilities Management Solutions, their holding company.

“Through the merger we are making great inroads into new markets and have grown our national footprint. The company has expanded exponentially from a small entity to a buoyant, medium sized company that is well positioned to offer clients, both large and small, a personal, professional and value-driven service,” Hendricks says.

FM Solutions was originally started as a small new venture in a sister company to one of the largest engineering companies in South Africa, the intention was to supplement the engineering business with the diversification of services through the acquisition and development of the FM business.

Today, it is a standalone business and, through the merger with Afroteq, it has significantly improved its footprint, expertise and customer base. As a consequence, FM Solutions and Afroteq now have four core offerings and services through these two brands: FM Solutions for programme and project management and facilities management and Afroteq for space planning and interior design as well as the training academy, Afroteq Academy.

“We are very proud of the fact that we can offer companies a turnkey Facilities Management solution encompassing a range of specialised as well as generalist services. We have a unique advantage over competitors as we train what we practice and we manage what we design, so we really listen to our clients and tailor a solution to meet their needs and their budgets as it must yield beneficial results,” Hendricks explains. “Afroteq FM Solutions strive to act as an enabler for clients by taking the burden of risk and turning it into a value-adding construct instead. We do this by identifying the high risk within facilities’ operational areas and then manage it according to the level of risk. By shifting risk and non core functions to FM specialists, an enterprise’s core processes are brought to the fore. This in essence allows greater clarity within enterprise strategic functioning which in turn means that potential opportunities can be better harnessed for growth by “freeing” previously encumbered resources. It really is all about rendering a facility ‘Fit for Purpose and enabling the business to operate at its optimum’.”

This is key philosophy and the cornerstone of a successful FM strategy.

“Facilities Management is essentially about applying processes that enable people to function at their optimum within the work place. Apart from applying expert insight to add value to enterprise functioning, the team go one step further and

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- References include the City of Cape Town, CityPower in Johannesburg, and the Department of Health, Eastern Province.

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also address the lack of skills within an enterprise resources skills base. Through the Afroteq Academy division, clients who manage their own facilities can benefit from tailored training solutions to better manage their facilities.”

A key example is FM’s maintenance solution for the department of health’s clinics and hospitals in the Makana, Cambedoo, Kouga and Nelson Mandela Bay Districts, under the control of the Coega Development Corporation, as an implementing agent for the department of health.

“We have been implementing maintenance solutions for the Department’s health facilities for just over a year now and have been instrumental in BBEE and SMME enterprise development through job creation whilst addressing the dire need at facilities where maintenance needed improvement,” says Hendricks.

“Through customised training and exposure on maintenance solutions we are confident that the site managers will become better equipped to implement processes that ensure better control and best practice for their sites.”

She compliments the Department of Health on their strategy and their structured approach in getting to the root of the health service delivery challenges and tackling them head on. In doing this, their process carries integrity and sustainability demonstrating that cost effective service delivery is indeed taking place and will continue in that vein.

But, this strategy also forms part of a bigger picture.

“When FM was at its infancy in this country, we realised that we needed to draw people into the industry to build capacity; we realised that an academy was needed. Through Afroteq Academy,

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we continue to build capacity in organisations and smaller support companies – in other words, our contractors – to create a greater resource pool for our industry because we believe that the more competent resources available, the more we can leverage pricing and the bigger pool we have to choose from. And, in so doing, we increase the opportunity for a competitive edge; not just price-wise but also in terms of quality.”

The company has no shortage of key projects and in April acquired a five-year contract to operate all the bus stations for the City of Cape Town’s new MyCiti Rapid Transport system. Afroteq FM Solutions is responsible for the cleaning, the security, maintenance, and cash management at all the stations as well as the basic validation of tickets.

Currently running 22 stations, its remit will grow as the system is expanded into more areas within the greater Cape Town area.

“Using a tap-in card system similar to the Gautrain system in Johannesburg, the MyCiti – which rolled out in 2011 - provides reliable and safe public transport for the locals,” says Hendricks. “It also offers tourists a safe and cost-effective route straight from the airport into the CBD with feeder routes within the City and parts of the West Coast.

“We are very proud to be associated with this prestigious contract which is a great boost for the local economy.”

In taking on the management of the contract, Afroteq FM Solutions inherited a large staff component from the City of Cape Town.

“We have recently embarked on a wide-scale training plan to up skill all the resources ensuring a high quality service delivery to the public. The client-public interface is critical to the overall value perception of the MyCiti system and the company want to

ensure that it is rated as a world-class service by its users.”

Hendricks adds that this necessitates continuous training and quality management strategies must be applied.

To crown these notable achievements the company’s design division Afroteq Design were appointed as the Interior Design Facilities Management, Acoustics Design and Space Planning for the construction and refurbishment for Department of Public Works’ Agrivaal building in the Tshwane CBD.

What is even more notable is that the building has been given a 4 Star Green Rating by the Green Building Council of South Africa- the first Government building in Tshwane to receive this prestigious award.

At the helm of this design was the Afroteq team that ensured that all the green specification requirements were met. The building incorporates an HVAC system with an economic cycle and ice storage system, DALI system – a lighting that controls the lighting of spaces in use and a “grey water system” to collect treats and reuse grey water.

Hendricks is thrilled that Afroteq FM Solutions was the first Facilities Management Company to lead the project’s consortium, usually led by architects.

“The Department of Public Works was adamant they wanted a building that took cognisance of facilities management best practice at the planning stage,” she says.

The prestigious project has attracted environmental praise and to Hendricks it’s a wonderful platform to promote Facilities Management as a discipline that needs cognisance at the planning stage of building and business construction which adds intrinsic value.

“The new tenants of the Agrivaal Building will be able to concur as



they experience this value first-hand when they move in towards the end of 2014,” she says. “All they will need to do on commissioning is simply bring along their files and settle in – everything else will have been fitted and all the required services will be fully functional.”

Surely businesses must now start to take cognisance of that kind of service delivery.

“If you take a small pilot project, learn from it and apply the lessons

to the big picture, then you will start to carve your path to success,” Hendricks concludes.

With a full multi-disciplinary team including highly skilled professionals, architectural project managers and their own in-house draughting as well as QS departments that compliment a high technical Facilities Management team, Afroteq FM Solutions is perfectly poised to continue on its path to success. ■

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