



FORWARDING AFRICAN TRANSPORT SERVICES (FATS)

SIZE DOES MATTER



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By employing a multi-disciplined and customer focused approach, FATS has retained its position as one of Southern Africa's most important freight forwarding businesses

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Entrance to the offices

Founded in 1992 by sisters Caron and Elaine Harris, FATS (the initials stand for Forwarding African Transport Services) has been built up from nothing to become a R200 million services company and a major player in the South African freight forwarding industry.

A well-established, financially secure, independently owned freight forwarder, the company provides permanent employment to 42 individuals. While most freight forwarders do different parts of the business separately, FATS decided to do them all, making it a business that today specialises in sea freight, air freight, road freight, warehousing, project and abnormal freight and customs clearing. Having such a wide skill base also means the company is best equipped to support its customers from start to finish as a one-stop operation.

With efficiency and innovation, FATS arranges imports and exports worldwide. Its success is due to its dynamic team which handles every job, irrespective of size, with the same level of enthusiasm, commitment and dedication. This allows the company to compete with all the major freight forwarders across the globe, not only in pricing but on service delivery. It also has an edge over many of its competitors because it has mastered the art of trading in Africa which is a difficult and volatile beast.

“The only thing we have to sell is

communications,” Caron Harris told us back in 2012. “We have based our entire existence over the last 20 years on delivering high service levels. We are not the cheapest, but our company is founded on the principles of communication and integrity: whether it is good news or bad news, we will give our customer the news. This is a personal service. Customers should not have to find out for themselves; it is our responsibility to tell them.”

A number of core values define FATS and make it stand out amongst its competitors. The first of these is superior service, whereby the company always strives to surpass its customers’ expectations by understanding their individual needs, and this is closely followed by the way FATS sets out to achieve excellence based on a set of holistic concepts and values.

Empowering its people is another key to FATS’ success. To achieve this it gives its employees the authority to make certain decisions, knowing that in today’s working world, people perform better if they have a say in operations. Good communication with said workforce has also proven invaluable and is very much the foundation of the business and it is through its communication streams that FATS is able to continuously emphasise that no single person is responsible for its success, rather it believes that its goals have been achieved through integrated teamwork where people’s strengths are combined for the greater good.

1992

 The year FATS was established

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FATS’ dedication to people also extends to its social responsibility programme which is heavily involved in the education of women. FATS supports a self-help centre for unemployed women where they can learn business and life skills. The aim is to empower them to enter the workplace and generate their own income so that they can become strong, independent South African citizens.

Today, FATS’s largest markets remain steel and paper, with the company also involved in project work, which it defines as the handling of abnormal loads, ‘out of gauge’ cargo, large structures and similarly unusual challenges. Paper is imported from Europe to Central Africa, while steel is two-way traffic. Structural steel is exported to China, for example, with specialist metals

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coming the other way. In recent years the company has been moving more towards project work, in areas like construction, energy and strategic investment to Central Africa. Meanwhile, businesses in China are becoming some of its biggest partners.

FATS’s knowledge of the continent’s infrastructure, as well as the end-to-end service it offers, represents a premium product. “We have set ourselves the target

of being a half-billion rand company,” Harris stated during our previous article. “Our BHAG [‘Big Hairy Audacious Goal’] is to get there in two years. Our BAG [‘Big Achievable Goal’] is to get there in three years.” **BE**

For more information about Forwarding African Transport Services (FATS) visit: www.fats.co.za



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