

FIRE CONTROL SYSTEMS

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CORPORATE BROCHURE



Fuelling growth

2011 is a milestone year for Fire Control Systems. Not only is it the 25-year anniversary of the company's launch, but it also marks the maturation of significant changes in company strategy and structure. Managing director Rodney Dodkins talks to Gay Sutton about migrating from a commercial organisation to a fully fledged corporate entity





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In the 25 years since its inception, Fire Control Systems (FCS) has established its position as one of South Africa’s leading providers of fixed fire protection solutions to the construction and mining sectors. With a head office in Johannesburg and regional offices in Durban, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and the Botswanan capital Gaborone, the company designs, supplies, manufactures and installs fixed fire protection solutions anywhere in Africa, from Algiers to Cape Town, and from athletics facilities and shopping malls to diamond mines and factories.

The organisation today has a turnover of more than R400 million a year and employs around 130 permanent engineering, design, sales and administrative staff at its HQ and regional offices. There are a further 110 employees at its manufacturing facility, which is largely responsible for manufacturing pipes and tanks, and 24 long-term preferred subcontracting enterprises who install the systems onsite. The company is, however, in the process of introducing meaningful change.

“This process was originally triggered by a changing of the guard over the past 24 months,” says managing director Rodney Dodkins. The process began two years ago when the original shareholders, including founder John Robertson, came to the decision that it was time to bow out of company ownership. Importantly for continuity in the company, though, they have remained actively involved in strategy and decision-making as consultants to the business.

Three of the original criteria for selecting a suitable replacement investor were to find an individual or organisation capable of partnering with FCS to help it migrate from what was essentially a commercial entity to a corporate entity; to prepare it for growth to the next level; and to enable it to become

a Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment participant. "Jala Capital came out top in our evaluation of suitable suitors and partners," says Dodkins. "And being a progressive company with plenty of experience at its disposal, it was felt it would add value to our business." The BBBEE transaction went ahead in 2008 and was concluded in 2010.

The vision and strategy for FCS going forward is to build on the success and reputation of the 25-year-old business. "Put very simply, our goal is to become the leading provider of fire protection solutions in sub-Saharan Africa." It's certainly an ambitious goal, and in preparation for this, an overarching rationalisation of the core business structure has been put in place.

Dodkins was appointed to the position of managing director in September last year to spearhead these changes in the company's strategy and structure. "Since my appointment last year, we have made a number of consolidations in the business. Where we used to run the separate divisions through separate management heads, we now have a single operations director responsible for all divisions. Similarly, we have a single sales director, and commercial director." The rationale behind this is that it will improve the efficiency and decision-making across the company, reduce duplication of processes and to ensure that all divisions share a single interpretation of vision and objectives. "By removing ambiguity across the organisation we will become a lot more focused."

Flowing down from this, a whole range of changes and improvements are being put in place, and are at various stages of implementation and completion. "Most of the improvements we are putting in place come down to the individual. Therefore, we're promoting a performance based culture where we encourage individuals to take ownership of their role in the business," Dodkins explains. "This will also help us with a planned introduction of staff incentive schemes."



Considerable effort has also gone into streamlining, improving and developing various functions in the business. Previously the HR element of FCS had been relatively informal, but the company is now establishing it as a core management discipline at the centre of the business, to formalise many of the policies and processes and to provide support for the change process. Ongoing staff training, for example, has always been encouraged as part of the FCS culture, but that is now being built into a more formal and targeted structure.

“Customer focus has also been highlighted as key to our future as we develop the business,” Dodkins points out. A significant element of improvement from this perspective will be achieved through formalised staff training: not only will this be targeted at continuously improving and updating engineering and design skills and industry knowledge, but also at improving customer interfacing skills and instilling the corporate values of responsibility, accountability and integrity.

The second element of the strategy for improving the customer experience is the establishment of a

phase II of the project. Planning for the survey was initiated last year, and once it's implemented, the results will then feed back to the EXCO as part of the continuous improvement process.

“We are also establishing initiatives to look beyond the internal operations of the business to other stakeholders,” Dodkins reveals. “Our subcontractors are as much a part of our business as our permanent office-based staff, and as we grow our business we want them to grow with us.” This is a critical element of the company's growth strategy and is being approached from several angles. To date, the company has been discussing with the industry watchdog, the Automatic Sprinkler Inspection Bureau (ASIB), the drafting of a set of training programmes for the industry's installing subcontractors. FCS is also actively assisting their subcontractors introduce a more formalised business structure to enable the delivery of a quality product.

A great deal has already been achieved. “We are already beginning to see benefits from the changes and improvements we've been introducing. I believe those improvements place us in a position to play a leading role in the local

industry,” Dodkins asserts.

In the longer-term it also prepares the company for its next strategic move—the planned opening of satellite offices across Africa. “And we have a programme in place for the forthcoming year that will initiate that process.” <http://www.firecontrol.co.za>

“Our goal is to become the leading provider of fire protection solutions in sub-Saharan Africa”

national 24-hour call centre, which is scheduled to open during the second quarter of the new financial year. Capable of handling a whole range of customer calls, ranging from technical and emergency requests through to general sales enquiries, it will also roll out a customer satisfaction survey as



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