

FACILITIESMANAGEMENT

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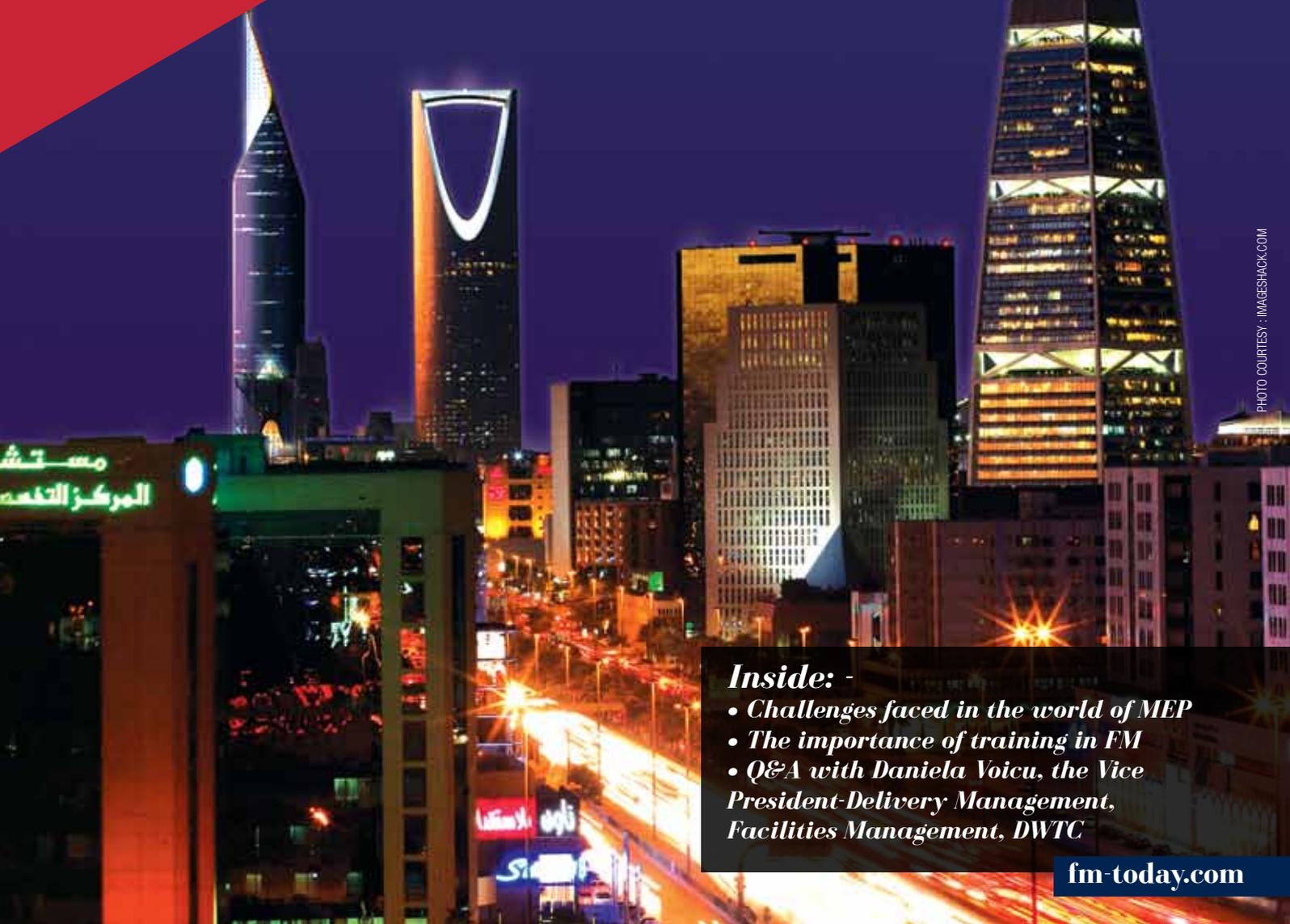


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- *Challenges faced in the world of MEP*
- *The importance of training in FM*
- *Q&A with Daniela Voicu, the Vice President-Delivery Management, Facilities Management, DWTC*

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## ▶ Tools of the trade

By Megha S Anthony



Operating a building and ensuring essentials like HVAC and AC systems, and similar equipment, keep running smoothly is a core focus of Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing (MEP) and is seen as an integral part of integrated facilities management. In fact, this currently contributes to 30 per cent of the overall FM offering.

After Dubai won the bid to host the Expo 2020 it has resulted in economic growth plans for UAE which has driven the growth of the building construction sector and subsequently the MEP sector also. Therefore, government

spending in residential, commercial, hospitality and infrastructure projects has driven the demand for the MEP market. Speaking to FM today, many firms who deal with MEP say that industry has reached a maturity level in the region to follow current trends of the economy in general.

Over the past decade Emrill has provided MEP services to its clients. Jason Ruehland, Managing Director of Emrill, says, "The Company has certainly enjoyed an upward trend with a 22 per cent growth in our MEP services. Additionally we have noticed that customers have gained a certain level of maturity when making buying decisions where clients prefer to see Emrill technicians with more than one trade qualification allowing for leaner teams and instant cost efficiencies." He goes on to add, "Clients have also shifted their attention to technical submissions for tenders as they now

have a better understanding of their own requirements and are looking for hard evidence around a service provider's capability and delivery. It has become imperative that service providers have training departments and technicians aligned with internationally recognised standards."

Like any growing industry, this too has its own set of challenges involved. Besides the usual challenges in servicing MEP systems that a Facility Manager faces on a daily basis, which include immediate resolutions of faulty conditions and proper execution of planned preventive maintenance programs; meeting the project deadlines where the MEP contractor is a subcontractor and is dependent on a lot of clearances from main contractor and other subcontractors. Constant changes in project design can also adversely affect the procurement strategies for



Azzaz Al Hothail, Maintenance Manager, United Facilities Management, Kuwait



MEP contractors and there are new challenges originating from the fact that MEP systems are becoming more intelligent and converged. "Recruiting skilled maintenance staff remains one of the key challenges we continue to face. The sizeable growth in the region's construction sector has created constraints in recruitment of experienced MEP engineers and staff. Lack of completeness of MEP installations in terms of documentation, proper commissioning reports and up-to-date schematics, is another major issue facility manager's face in almost all built environment. In addition, when facility managers assume the management responsibility of buildings, most often they find partial or complete absence of communication between MEP contractors and manufacturers. Software-rich systems will inadvertently lack updates and hence create issues in support that could potentially cause equipment failure," says Azzaz Al Hothail, Maintenance Manager, United Facilities Management, Kuwait.

Azzaz goes on to add, "Also, owners tend to give low priority to maintenance and support requirements for their buildings and rely solely on the contractors maintenance agreements



Medha Sukthankar, General Manager, Al Shirawi Electrical & Mechanical Engineering Co

which typically address maintenance support for no more than two years. Early involvement of facilities management is key to the success of servicing and maintaining MEP systems."

One practice that hurts rather than helps the industry is the bidding process. Says Medha Sukthankar, General Manager, Al Shirawi Electrical & Mechanical Engineering Co, "Competitive bidding is one of the challenges as companies less experienced in certain market segments often submit low bids and then lack the expertise or the manpower to successfully complete the job."

Medha also says that sourcing manpower has become another major challenge in the industry due to rising inflation in UAE, and currency appreciation in emerging economies. For Jason, it is the lack of UAE or GCC standards for technical services that proves to be a big challenge in the industry. "For example anyone can work on a wiring system without a formal qualification, which could result in hazards such as building fires due to negligence or lack of technical skills. There are several international benchmarks to act as a guide from the UK, Europe and USA that the government could select as standards to be implemented with Middle East specifications which could be enforced to protect asset integrity, buildings and prevent hazards," he says.

The existence of proper competition has a healthy aspect in any business sector and facilities management

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*Azzaz Al Hothail*

is no different. In the case of MEP, competition has led to many positive impacts on the industry. Says Medha, "With lower prices and more choices for clients there have been some potential gains due to increased competition. One can see improvements to the quality of service for consumers. Skill sets improvement as the industry needs to expand their skill sets through training programs and begin recruiting and preparing the new workforce with the necessary skills in order to be competitive."

Competitive environment leads to efficiency, innovation and permanent enhancement of service delivery. "As for MEP maintenance services, the competition from main MEP contractors is continuously enforcing the silos approach to facilities management. MEP contractors tend to consider the maintenance of MEP systems as a





When we look at the notable trends in the world of MEP, then the advancement and adoption of technology is definitely one of them. "MEP industry is now implementing clear and detailed HSE policies and best practices to ensure labour safety during MEP work. Trends like stringent civil defense regulations which are following international standards can be seen. Now quality control processes are being used to ensure that the quality in a product or service are as per specifications and match project requirement," states Medha.

The need for efficiency and sustainability are also notable trends that are affecting MEP maintenance.

The deployment of energy management systems, not in all countries of the region, is on the rise and attention to energy savings is becoming an operational necessity rather than a good-to-have in any type of facilities. Azziz also states other notable trends like the use of plug-and-play technologies that enhance intelligent monitoring and fault detection and the use of CAFM systems. "With CAFM, MEP personnel implement rigid planned preventive maintenance regime and can effectively manage any work undertaken by sub-contractors. CAFM systems enable the extension of coordination efforts required between different trades within the facility."

Despite all these challenges, what stands out the most is the passion in which the firms provide the services. After all MEP services are the most challenging services to deliver in any type of facilities. ■

natural continuation of their contracting services and hence don't find the necessity to coordinate with facilities management and choose to deal with the owner directly. This creates an issue in implementing integrated or total facility management services in any built environment. On the other hand, competition within major MEP system manufacturers is leading to the adoption of new technologies which in turn is assisting in facilitating the execution of pro-active maintenance and enhancing the troubleshooting and fault isolation procedures. In addition, such systems are adding advanced and comprehensive capabilities in monitoring, sensing and managing alarms. Such capabilities equip the MEP maintenance staff with tools to better respond to fault conditions and to real-time monitor MEP systems. Obviously this leads to enhanced customer service and more importantly the increase in the lifespan of equipment which has direct cost-savings implication," explains Azzaz.

When it comes to Emrill, they have maintained high client retention rates despite the increased competition as they deliver high quality standards. "However, we believe that finding staff with the right competencies and technical skills will become increasingly challenging for the industry with Expo 2020 and the World Cup on the horizon. Service providers will have to look at different ways of attracting talent and developing technical skills in-house, which could also result in an increase of apprenticeship programs," adds Jason.

