

S.A. TALKE reaches milestone, celebrates 15th anniversary

The company's unique business approach has become a mainstay of logistics in the chemical and petrochemicals sector winning major clients, MAKHLOUF BENZAHIA, S.A. TALKE's CEO tells ABDULAZIZ KHATTAK in an exclusive interview

STANDING strong and celebrating its 15th anniversary, S.A. TALKE has reached a milestone this March for serving the Saudi market for over a decade and a half. Due to its wealth of industry knowledge and German/Saudi heritage, the company has gained its reputation as a world-class logistic service provider for the chemical and petrochemical industry. Proudly serving many industry leaders of the petrochemical industry, S.A. TALKE is currently operating over 14 projects with the total throughput volume of 17.5 million MT (as of 2018).

Established in Saudi Arabia in 2004, S.A. TALKE represents a strong partnership in its inception—between Saudi Arabia's Azmeel group of companies and Saudi Industrial Services Company (SISCO) with their German partner Alfred Talke, a 72-year-old global logistics services provider. The company has since its early days established itself as a unique and reliable logistic partner in the chemical and petrochemical sector.

Today it's a major player in this region offering a diverse range of services to meet client's needs and expectations.

S.A. TALKE's services include onsite operation, packaging, plant operation, maintenance of packaging lines and various sophisticated and complex machinery such as robots and high-tech cranes, specialised transportation, container yard management, silos storage, and bagging. With its unique expertise and global reach, the company is also able to support its clients in designing plants and logistics facilities that meet all industry related standards.

Over the past years, S.A. TALKE has seen a positive evolution, having expanded its footprint in Jubail, gaining new clients as well as growing with existing ones and having established a footprint in the Western Region. It has built a strong team of over 1,800 employees in Saudi Arabia proudly serving its clients every day.

In an interview with *OGN*, Makhlof Benzahia, S.A. TALKE's CEO says that this achievement didn't come easy. "We had to really work hard in establishing a world-class team and make them focus on one objective – excellence! We are driven by a clear vision and shared goals making us function as one unit, our aim is to be successful everyday by adding value to what we do."

He says: "At S.A. TALKE, we create a vibrant work atmosphere, we developed an environment where our people can reach their potential. And by investing in people, each employee has the opportunity to develop his skills and career with the company. Building our strong, successful multicultural team is perhaps the best way to celebrate S.A. TALKE's 15 years of achievement in Saudi Arabia."

S.A. TALKE's unique business approach has become a mainstay of logistics in the chemical and petrochemicals sector, winning major clients both in the Eastern and Western regions.

"In fact, when it comes to outsourcing in the petrochemicals industry, the first partner that comes to mind is S.A. TALKE," says Benzahia.

"And the reasons," he explains, "is because we are unique—we build relationships with our clients based on trust and mutual respect, we support openness and collaboration, we add value and we believe in participating to make our clients more successful every-day. At S.A. TALKE, we challenge our self to deliver higher quality standards while ensuring safety in all situations first."

S.A. TALKE counts amongst its prestigious clients, big names like Tasnee, Saudi Polymers Company (SPCO), Saudi Acrylic Monomer Company Limited (Samco), Natpet, Dow, Sadara, SABIC, and PetroRabigh.

Benzahia says it's rare to find a service provider and principal that are really integrated to the point that they are almost the same company.

"It is this rarity that has led some clients to remain strong partners ever since we started in Saudi Arabia. For example, TASNEE has been with us for over 12 years, Sabic has been on board for the past 6 years, Natpet for over 5 years, and PetroRabigh has signed up as a partner for the next 10 years."

S.A. TALKE's contribution to the petrochemical logistics sector in Saudi Arabia's has been significant with many success stories. "For instance, in Jubail, we operate a complex of three plants for one of our clients, manage their transportation in addition to offsite operations. Overall, we handle for them over two million tonnes volume annually creating value by consolidation for an efficient use of resources, thus clearly showing the wide scope of services S.A. TALKE has to offer," Benzahia says.

In the West coast equally, for a client, the company has put to-



Benzahia ... keen on continuous improvement

gether a huge team of over 700 employees that manages their operations 24/7. This includes packaging and bagging lines, and maintenance of some very sophisticated equipment in the petrochemicals industry.

In collaboration with its clients, S.A. TALKE is also operating some unique and complex projects in the region diversifying the scope of its services, says Benzahia.

"We are currently operating a complex material and container terminal site for one of our clients and we have acquired a project to operate a unique truck terminal – the first of its kind in Saudi Arabia. This goes to prove S.A. TALKE's quest for exploring new opportunities and its ability to deliver challenging projects successfully."

In the engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) segment, S.A. TALKE has executed a 10-year design, build and operation project of a multi-user facility for a key client in Jubail Industrial. The project has been running successfully for the last 8 years meeting all its design criteria.

After cementing its presence in the Eastern Province, S.A. TALKE has moved to the Western coast, where it has seen rapid growth and now has a sizeable team of over 800 people and clients such as PetroRabigh and Natpet. Supporting the company capture the market and grow successfully there are "plug and play" processes, as Benzahia puts it.

S.A. TALKE is well known for first-class standardisation and management processes, a pool of knowledge it has built over the years. These processes really cater to pretty much most of the petrochemicals business requirement. "So now when we win a new business, we have 70 per cent of our processes that are just plug and play, making the project management phase shorter and more successful," says Benzahia.

Benzahia says the company is keen on continuous improvement as this adds value to the client. This includes exchange of knowledge internally about any new technology, innovation and new practices in the industry so that employees are aware of the latest happenings.

With increased competition, S.A. TALKE is confident of its strengths. "Due to our core values and unique business approach, we will continue adding value to our clients. We don't shy away from competition and in fact have instances where we manage our competitors, creating delivery and execution plans so that we jointly focus on delivering end user needs," says Benzahia.

A point Benzahia considerably lays stress upon is how the company's employees are valued. He says by focusing on individuals, the company can surely move forward.

"We make sure to put our employees first. We reward them, train them, invest in them and, therefore, they become an integral part of our business."

For him, success is not only where you get the machinery from, but it lies more importantly in the team of skilled people put together to run them. Also important is good leadership, good strat-

egy and a clear vision about what the team will do.

S.A. TALKE is a Gulf SQAS Assessed company, currently holding assessments for the Transport and Warehouse Module. Safety is a core value – an absolute must, as Benzahia puts it, so much so that when an employee joins the organisation, a thorough safety induction and training programme is followed.

"The company has a clear system to support any newcomer to understand all safety requirements. Every one of us has to undergo official training to be abreast of safety requirements of the company and industry requirements," says Benzahia.

There are ongoing refresher campaigns for employees where focus is laid on every single opportunity.

S.A. TALKE applies the behaviour-based safety (BBS) approach and recently added Act Safety Program (ASP), which encourages people to ACT on the spot to stop any unsafe act, thus empowering employees to take decisions and avoid unsafe events taking place.

"This culture is in fact rewarded in the company. Every quarter, we select the best three safety ACTs and reward them through certificates and monetary awards," says Benzahia.

Likewise with regards to quality, S.A. TALKE has a variety of initiatives and reward programmes designed to appreciate the contribution of its people.

S.A. TALKE currently operates its own 100,000 sq m site inside Jubail Commercial Port. The facility has 24 silos, bagging lines and two warehouses. "We are looking to expand by building another facility in Jubail Industry City very soon, planning for which is already in the initial stages."

He says the planned facility will be built over 300,000 sq m and will have warehouses, yards for containers and material storage and will cater to existing clients as well as future expansion.

"It's going to be a unique site and cement our presence in the industrial area," he adds.

Commenting on market conditions, Benzahia says that market pressures will always exist, whether caused by fluctuating oil prices, geopolitical situations or other external factors, and the way to weather these challenges is to embrace a change management culture that prepares the team for change and allows each team member to successfully deal with challenges in a most efficient manner.

Regarding Saudi Arabia's economy and in light of the 2030 vision, Benzahia lends full support to the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's transformation agenda.

He believes it will give Saudi Arabia a unique competitive advantage, adding: "With huge natural resources, a young and well-educated population, we will see a different Saudi Arabia in the next few years."

With the current investment, Benzahia expects significant downstream development in the petrochemical industry; a diversified economy; and Saudi Arabia becoming an industrial powerhouse in a few years.