

DAVIS & SHIRTLIFF

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Shirtliff

AND ALTIORA PETO



In 1946 Davis & Shirtliff was founded as a water supply contracting company in Kenya. During the 67 years of its existence, it has grown into one of the leading distributors of water-related equipment in East Africa. And as infrastructure projects expand and demand for convenient access to water increases, the company is certain to see its products and brand reach an even greater level of success.



CEO ALEC DAVIS



DEPUTY CEO DAVID GATENDE

WITH A BUSINESS presence spanning decades, Davis & Shirliff is known throughout the East African region for its wide variety of high-quality products including water pumps, pool equipment, water treatment equipment, solar equipment and power products.

The Kenyan-based group operates through a network of 28 branches in the region that include Kenyan branches as well as subsidiaries in Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Rwanda and Ethiopia. Alec Davis, chief executive officer of Davis & Shirliff says the company is selling its products in South Sudan, Burundi and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) as well and is also investigating opportunities in Somalia. The company's goal is to offer a comprehensive and competitive product range suitable for growing infrastructure demands and the need for efficient water supply as well as play an integral role in the region's economic development.

The company imports and distributes products from world-leading companies in the industry including Grundfos, Pedrollo, Davey and GE Water as well as importing, manufacturing and assembling their own products under the Dayliff brand. The objective is to provide its customers with choice and the best quality available on the international market.

Although the customer for water pumps is almost everyone as the need for water is as pervasive as the need for oxygen, Davis says the company likes to work closely with industry providers like plumbers and installers and drillers, as well as regular end-users including governments, NGOs and private businesses. One example is Davis & Shirliff recently supplied and installed 32 boreholes within Nairobi for the Athi Water Service Board who is investing heavily in its water infrastructure.



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Another interesting recent project was at Lantana Galu Beach Hotel where a Dayliff Wastewater Treatment Plant was installed capable of treating all wastewater generated on the property to a standard suitable for irrigation or discharge into the environment.

Sharing Knowledge


With an industry that is becoming increasingly sophisticated as Kenya moves towards becoming a middle income country driven by the development of mobile technology that makes the entire East African region more accessible for businesses like

Davis & Shirtliff, the company is making it a priority to be on top of the environmental and technology changes that are occurring as the market expands.

According to Davis, the company does not just stop at being a distributor and manufacturer, but strives to become the provider of solutions that incorporate products being used optimally as components in systems. This enables customers to take the best advantage of Davis & Shirtliff's experience and expertise.

To support its activities the company offers various types of training programs to not only 'share the wealth' of knowledge, but to generally

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raise skill-levels. “We have our own training school that focuses on two main training needs; internal and external,” explains Davis. “We carry out a number of internal trainings for our technicians and engineers using our own resource people and also do our own external training for our customers. The external programmes are particularly popular and they help build customer loyalty.”

He continues: “they are basically extensions of our internal programmes but we do it for external institutions and organizations that have their own technicians so they can improve the efficiency and maintenance of the equipment they buy.”





Davis & Shirtliff has also developed a training programme for service providers and has trained hundreds of people in the last five years. “We have a six week program which we offer – free of charge – to suitable people when we train them in our products, in our processes and in our technology base,” explains Davis.



The company accepts that not all of these technicians who launch their own businesses will work exclusively with Davis & Shirtliff products. But what the company is doing is raising industry standards for both installation and maintenance so that when one of its trained technicians is used, it knows its customers will be working with competent and knowledgeable professionals.



“We have so many pumps and so much equipment in use that we cannot manage every requirement ourselves. So now we are trying – very successfully – to develop trained technicians to take over that role. Before, it was very poorly educated. But now we’ve put over 200 of these technicians into the field and made life much easier for our customers.”



“We are different ...”

“We have a number of critical success factors that differentiate us,” explains Davis. An important one is that of the 400 company employees, around two-thirds graduated from university and many

have post-graduate qualifications. The hiring scheme is very strict and regulated, says Davis. Staff development programs are also used to ensure that customer service levels are of the highest standards.

One of the biggest challenges in Africa is delivering product to the customer, especially in the more remote areas. Davis says the company has invested heavily in distribution and stock to establish a very effective supply chain. “Our network of branches must have an efficient system for stock management and our processes certainly give us market advantage,” says Davis, also explaining how brand development has helped the company expand and increase demand. “The key thing is to be able to supply the product where and when it is needed,” he adds.

The company has also developed a comprehensive reference of all products it offers. The customer can either refer to the printed product manual, conveniently view the same information on the company’s website or even view it on the recently released smart phone app to be able to make the choice best suited to their needs. “Once the customer has selected the product, they contact us and we make it available,” says Davis.

Another important strategy that the company strives to implement is to be consistent in its policy, prices and service so customers can buy

the products with confidence. “If the prices are fair and stable, people will have confidence in the products they buy,” says Davis. “We have attacked the market by focusing on support rather than the hard sell. It’s an important differentiating factor that the market appreciates.”

Future Outlook

The company also has a focused strategy with which it plans to ensure continued future growth. The “footprint strategy” – as Davis calls it – is what drives this objective which prioritises both developing the number of products in the portfolio as well as increasing the number of markets, current plans being to add three new branches this year.

It also passionately believes in its three core values of: Integrity, Quality and *Altiora Peto* – the desire to constantly seek higher things and never be just satisfied with the status quo.

Davis concludes by saying that: “Africa is the hot place at the moment. There is a considerable growth potential and many developments will happen in the next 10 years [...] we see many new opportunities.” **TABJ**



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