

DAVIS AND SHIRTLIFF PUMP IT!



PROVIDING A RANGE OF PRODUCTS TO A NUMBER OF MARKETS, DAVIS AND SHIRTLIFF IS ENTERING THE LATEST PHASE OF GROWTH IN ITS ALREADY EXCITING HISTORY.

PUMP IT!

The Davis & Shirliff Group is the East African region's leading supplier of water related equipment.

“We are a well-established company started by my father, Eddie Davis, and his partner Dick Shirliff back in 1946. We've always been in the water supply space,” explains Alec Davis, the Group's chairman. “We grew progressively through the 60s and 70s though really started developing in the 90s as the Kenyan economy expanded. The company started with a focus on water projects and pumps, though over the years has expanded into a wider span of activities.”

Today the company's activities are focused on six principal product sectors - Water Pumps, Boreholes, Swimming Pools, Water Treatment, Generators, Solar Equipment and Irrigation. The company operates from a network of branches, many in Kenya though also through subsidiaries in Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Rwanda, South Sudan, DRC and a partnership in Ethiopia.

“We have about 750 permanent staff and 200 outsourced workers, with 64 branches in eight countries,” Davis tells us. “We're market leaders in the

principal countries where we operate and this year our revenue will be about \$90 million.”

Davis & Shirliff have built a name for itself distributing high quality equipment sourced from world leading industry players including Grundfos from Denmark, Pedrollo from Italy and Davey from Australia as well as carrying out their own manufacture and assembly of several water related products. This combination of carefully sourced quality equipment and their own manufacturing have given Davis & Shirliff a product portfolio that is industry leading.

“There's no company I know of anywhere in the world with the same sort of product mix that we have,” Davis says proudly. “Other companies tend to be have a more narrow focus. Our wider range of related products has enabled us to develop our branch network. That's a very important aspect of what differentiates us.”

The company has also placed a particular emphasis on infrastructure investment, and the company is spread through a network of modern premises with a fully integrated ICT network and huge stocks of products and spare parts. It is also proud of its digital expertise including a number of product information initiatives, notably its progressive >>

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“THERE’S NO COMPANY I KNOW OF ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD WITH THE SAME SORT OF PRODUCT MIX THAT WE HAVE.”

D&S Flo App and an effective presence on social media.

“Our culture is one of a committed and professional organisation with high levels of integrity and competence,” Davis says. “Our policy of opening branches has been very successful, our advanced ERP systems enabling us to do this and keep effective operational control.”

The group is administered from its Nairobi HQ, which covers over 10,000 square metres and includes extensive administration and training as well as large warehousing and manufacturing facilities. Logistics is an important focus with consignments being distributed into the supply chain by the company’s own fleet of

trucks, the quality focus of the processes being assured through ISO 9001:2015 certification.

AN ESSENTIAL ROLE

Supplying water is obviously an essential priority for regional development and Davis & Shirliff plays an important role in the industry. This is a role that the company takes very seriously, offering a comprehensive and competitive product range with regional availability and unrivalled technical and service support.

However as important as the company’s role is within the region, the African market also brings its own challenges.

“Obviously working in African markets can be challenging,

with economic fluctuations and an unpredictable tax and regulatory environment,” Davis admits. “It seems to penalise larger companies, and even a company like us with almost an obsession with compliance can face problems. Each country has its own rules and procedures and satisfying them all is not easy, particularly the various complications of regional exporting which should be simplified with the various trade blocks but is not.”

As Davis points out, ultimately the key issues is resources.

“We have developed our own well-resourced supply and logistics function that enables us to understand and comply with the various regulations,” Davis says. “One of the challenges is maintaining product availability in all markets, some of which are larger than others. That is a very important differentiating



“WE TEND TO ATTRACT HIGH-CALIBRE GRADUATES SO WE HAVE NO PROBLEM RECRUITING”

factor. We have been reasonably successful at that though periodic shortages are inevitable.”

POOLING TALENT

Indeed, as for all organisations of all the resources that Davis & Shirliff has developed, the most important is people. Through a policy of careful selection and training the company has a very competent and committed workforce which have provided the capacity for the growth achieved.

“We find that in many African countries there’s a large talent pool,” Davis tells us. “We tend to attract high-calibre graduates so

we have no problem recruiting. In some countries the engineers are less competent and trained but across Africa if you profile yourself in the right way with progressive employment terms and conditions the right talent can be found.”

The company isn’t content to simply hire that talent however. Once employed these people become a valued resource to be invested in and developed.

“We have a busy training function. We do literally hundreds of training sessions each year, both externally and internally,” Davis says. “We’re regularly using

^ The management team

skype for this because of our spread over so many branches. We hold regular training sessions in different product areas and skill sets that are available online. We’re just starting now a leadership course that will focus on different aspects of developing management talent.”

Moving forward, Davis & Shirliff are focusing on three main areas of growth.

“One is engineering. We are developing a significant capacity in higher tech engineering products, especially in the areas

“WE’VE JUST INITIATED THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW LOGISTICS CENTRE OUTSIDE NAIROBI. THIS WILL BE AN IMPORTANT RESOURCE FOR US AS IT WILL INCREASE OUR DISTRIBUTION CAPACITY”

of operation and control. We build our own control panels as well as design and assemble complex water treatment and pumping equipment.” Engineering is a priority area for growth, as Davis points out, “There is generally a lack of engineering capacity in the East and Central Africa region so there is a reliance on imported equipment which tends to be more expensive and less serviceable. We believe there’s great opportunity in building indigenous capacity.”

The second area Davis & Shirliff is focusing on is more complex projects, especially in the solar pumping area with a number of impressive projects recently undertaken, notably several large installations in Northern Uganda. The third focus is distribution.

“We have our own range of Dayliff pumps, so distribution of them is important for us to build

volumes,” Davis says. “We’ve just initiated the construction of a new logistics centre outside Nairobi. This will be an important resource for us as it will increase our distribution capacity, good stock availability being a differentiating factor in this market. That’s where much of our focus is. The fact that we’re own-branded has given us a competitive advantage and that has really boosted our business over the last few years.”

By any measure Davis & Shirliff is certainly a progressive company and an example of how to become internationally competitive with the right culture and management. One of its values is ‘Altiora Peto’, a Latin phrase that relates to continuous progress and improvement and its target is to become a Pan-African organisation. With its ambition and resources there is no reason why this should not be achieved. ☺



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