

Independent Identity

Middle East Consultant talks to Jeffrey Badman about HKA's goals and objectives in the region, following its demerger from Hill International in 2017

Early last year, news broke that Hill International's consultancy services division would become an independent company. Continuing to focus on construction advisory, consulting and expert services, the new entity, known as HKA, continued to operate from the 40 global offices its nearly 1,000 strong team of consultants occupied before its sale and demerger from Hill.

The new company's official unveiling in the UAE took place early in November 2017, at the Palace Downtown Dubai. The gala was attended by 220 guests, as well as several senior executives from HKA, including David Merritt, partner and head of region for the Middle East and Africa, and CEO Renny Borhan. Following the gala, *Middle East Consultant* caught up with Jeffrey Badman, partner at HKA, for a chat.

What key trends and nuances did you notice in the GCC in 2017?

In the first six to eight months of 2017, there was a general lack of liquidity in the Middle East due to the low price of oil. This prompted significant restructuring of organisations and debt across the region, both in government and private entities, and an increase in the move towards encouraging foreign investment in infrastructure projects, with PPP project finance featuring highly.

Give us an overview of your business in the GCC since the demerger, and highlight any stand-out markets or sectors.

While going through our own transition following the demerger from Hill International mid-year, HKA has focused on its core professional services, delivering high-quality solutions to our clients in the region. We have been engaged predominately on complex power and water desalination projects, which have tended to be immune from prevailing market trends and driven by demand.

What objectives have you laid out over the next 12 months?

Our focus will be on further developing our relationships with high-quality clients, with the goal of assisting them in resolving their

problems, whatever they may be. This is where HKA adds the most value – we decode project complexity and provide the best possible outcomes for our clients.

What changes do you plan to make, if any, to HKA internally to align with market realities?

Our greatest strength is our people. Their knowledge and expertise repeatedly deliver the best possible outcomes for our clients. That is why implementing the HKA Academy, which is a training scheme that will focus on the development of our technical staff's core skills, is so important to us. The advantage of investing in the academy is two-fold, it will provide consistency of approach and best practice, and develop and support succession planning throughout our global business.

How do you see the ME market shaping up in the next year?

The number of projects under construction, following a tough 2017, appears to be on the increase as the oil price slowly recovers, and the regional drive to lower costs and attract foreign investment through PPP financing models takes a fuller effect. HKA will focus its efforts on core services, delivering high-quality solutions to its clients' problems on power and water, renewables, infrastructure and O&G projects. In particular, we have seen an increased appetite from our employer side clients to engage us early to help them practise dispute avoidance, rather than resolving their claims through arbitration or litigation.

Which services contributed the most to HKA's bottom line in the last 12 months?

A growing part of HKA's business in the Middle East is our Expert Group, which provides a triumvirate of engineering, delay and quantum experts, testifying in major disputes. Over the next 12 months, we are looking to grow the technical forensic team to deliver a wider spectrum of expertise.

Are there any markets that you are keen on expanding into?

HKA is looking to continue to build a strong reputation for the new brand name, consolidate its position in the Middle East market and



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The firm held its official brand launch in Dubai on November 1.

strengthen our relationships with our key clients. We will continue to focus our efforts on our core markets across a variety of projects.

How are you planning to make a mark in that market?

HKA is focused on becoming the pre-eminent globally connected brand in our space, where we will continue to anticipate, investigate and resolve project challenges. As trusted independent consultants, experts and advisers, we will deliver solutions amid uncertainty, dispute and over-run. We aim to expand our portfolio to continue to include some of the world’s largest and most prestigious projects.

What technology will have the biggest impact in the market?

Michael Konieczka, international director of PMWeb Services, HKA, responds: Advances in power storage will have the biggest impact. We will also see increased use and expansion of AR in the construction industry. Additionally, we’ve found that the need for collaborative tools for managing all stakeholders and increasing communication has been on the rise, and is becoming more embraced in the Middle East market. Through the use of these tools, we will see a greater desired use of mobile platforms and mobile apps to provide the necessary inputs for these systems.

Wearable technology is a trend that is just coming into the market, and its use will continue to grow as the development improves. The industry is moving towards big data gathering and providing analytics for historical information, building performance and real-time reporting. The need to be able to report on all aspects of a PMO and the associated projects requires hundreds, if not thousands, of inputs from multiple stakeholders to provide the necessary analytics. This is being supported and driven by the increased acceptance of cloud-based collaboration platforms. ●

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