Offering total solutions

Total Facility Engineering builds up capabilities to be a one-stop shop for clients. BY EVANGELINE LIM, KAMALPREET KAUR D/O ARWINDERJIT SINGH AND SITO WYNCE

When Ng Cheng Chuan set up Total Facility Engineering Pte Ltd (TFE) in 2013, he knew he wanted the company to neither be the biggest dog in the yard nor the smallest. Rather, the facility engineering solutions provider would find its niche in between — offering services that small local contractors do not, while representing a more competitive offering than large multinational companies (MNCs).

Now, TFE provides precisely what its name suggests: total facility engineering solutions, which smaller contractors might not have the necessary capability or capacity to undertake.

With this strategic direction, and the continual seizing of opportunities, TFE has grown from its origins as a specialised subcontractor to a main contractor today. Just 2 years after incorporation, it achieved ISO and Occupational Health and Safety Series certifications.

And in both 2019 and 2020, TFE received the Enterprise 50 (E50) award. Says Ng, who is also the company’s director: “Together with a diligent and committed team, we have been very fortunate to have the enduring support of our network of contacts and clients and management’s foresight that have helped to open up opportunities for us to grow exponentially in the last 8 years.”

Growth and challenges

TFE started off as a subcontractor providing piping solutions in the semiconductor industry, with projects that were mainly small scale. But it built up its engineering capabilities until it was capable of delivering not just specific solutions, but complete ones.

TFE’s staff strength has grown from just 1 employee to 33 today. It now offers a wide range of high value-added services, including clean room solutions; small to middle-sized mechanical, electrical and process turnkey systems; air-conditioning and mechanical ventilation systems; and energy management systems.

This suite of capabilities allows TFE to fulfil multi-disciplinary projects, securing a competitive edge over its competitors.

Asked how he feels about the firm’s achievements, Ng replies: “I am quite happy and blessed. I didn’t expect it to grow at this rate.”

Emphasising the importance of prevailing in the face of adversity, as crucial for a business’ survival and growth, TFE itself has faced stiff competition and numerous challenges, including that of finding the right talent. As a small and medium-sized enterprise, it often finds itself competing with larger corporations to attract talent.

More recently, TFE’s resilience was put to the test in the Covid-19 pandemic on various fronts.

The uncertainty and constantly changing landscape made it difficult to strategise and commit to new projects.

The large outflow of migrant workers caused a manpower shortage and a rise in labour costs.

Pandemic-fuelled supply chain disruptions resulted in higher material prices.

As most of TFE’s work involves employees performing installation works on-site for customers, work from home was almost impossible.

Furthermore, a significant portion of TFE’s employees are migrant workers living in dormitories.

With the Covid-19 outbreak in migrant worker dormitories, as well as the "breakcase" restrictions imposed in April 2020, TFE had to endure it all in 2020 with no operations.

In these unprecedented times, TFE has opted to be conservative in its business operations and choice of projects.

Through the situation slowly improved in 2021, TFE remains prudent and cautious as it adapts to operations in the new normal.

Ng attributes much of the firm’s success to loyal customers who have supported and remained with the company, despite the pandemic disruptions its plans. But TFE quickly adapted, scrutinising other sectors for opportunities. With such active exploration, it has wasted no time in venturing into new industries.

One such area is food sustainability. Land scarcity has pushed Singapore to become a global leader in urban agriculture, with rooftop gardens and vertical farms, and TFE is keen to be part of this story.

“We want to be part of the Singapore Food Agency’s 30 by 30 plan by getting involved in projects to expand Singapore’s food self-production level to buffer us from food supply disruptions,” says Ng, referring to Singapore’s goal of producing 30% per cent of its nutritional needs locally by 2030.

TFE is thus working on potential projects that involve constructing facilities for vertical farming.

It also hopes to get involved in another of Singapore’s latest food-tech endeavours: to become a hub for alternative protein.

As new industries emerge, with new demands for plants and equipment, the scope of what it means to offer total facility engineering solutions will expand. True to its name, TFE will keep growing its capabilities, so it can continue to deliver.

Ng emphasised his importance in the importance of persisting in the face of adversity, and says a never-give-up attitude is crucial for a business’ survival and growth.