

Tellumat Wows Civil Aviation Market With Military Pedigree And Full Service Offering

Tellumat Air Traffic Management (ATM), the seasoned technology and service provider to airports around southern Africa, is extending its military success into the civil aviation space, with a number of big wins and even bigger ones in the pipeline.

All-round portfolio

This business unit of the Tellumat technology group offers 35-plus years' experience in the supply, installation, maintenance support and upgrade of air traffic management systems, including radar systems and ground-based navigational aids. During this period the primary focus was on the defence market, with the South African Air Force being the main client.

Along the way it has built up a full service and solution portfolio, complemented by significant skills in systems and software design, solutions supply and installation, as well as maintenance support and upgrades, says managing executive Bennie Langenhoven.

The decision to give the civil aviation market equal and undiluted focus was a logical step, as it allows the unit to fully leverage its depth and breadth of technical, including software, and project skills, he says.

Venerable history

Tellumat ATM's impressive track record is inseparable from that of the group, whose portfolio also includes defence, manufacturing and communications.

The company traces its roots back more than a half century to the early 1960s, when UK-based Plessey set up shop in South Africa. In 1989, the SA operation opted out of the UK group and in 1995 it listed on the JSE, whereafter Tellumat was spun out along with other group companies (1998).

Langenhoven, whose own history at Tellumat goes back 15 years, says in years gone by Plessey supplied radar systems and instrument landing systems (ILS) to the defence and civilian markets. It also maintained these systems – in some cases for over 30 years (through mid-life upgrades, some of the systems are still in operation, thanks to Tellumat ATM).

“With the replacement of some of that equipment, we have now refocused on supplying this sector,” says Langenhoven. “We have relationships with a number of reputable original equipment

manufacturers [OEMs], including Indra and Safegate for ILS and airfield ground lighting [AGL] systems.”

New deals

“We've already had success at various airports, and are excited to be building on that with some exciting deals in the pipeline,” he continues.

The unit recently completed a large contract for upgrades at the Mahikeng airport, is currently supplying and installing an AGL system at Somerset East Airport, and has just won an AGL supply contract with the Kwandwe Private Game Reserve in the Eastern Cape.

The Tanzanian Civil Aviation Authority also recently awarded a contract to Tellumat ATM to provide maintenance support to their installed base of ground-based navigation aids and radar systems. This includes the provision of engineering services and training.

“Beyond ILS and AGL systems, we’re working with a number of OEMs to provide radar and direction finders,” he adds. Tellumat ATM is adding to its Mahikeng business with an installation of direction finders for ATNS (Air Traffic and Navigation Services, which controls 10% of the globe’s airspace in terms of geographical coverage).

Looking ahead

“The objective is to grow our footprint significantly over the next 2-3 years and become a better recognised alternative supplier of these systems,” says Langenhoven.

As this sector is contested strongly by a number of competitors Tellumat won’t have overnight success, he concedes.

But it offers something the others don’t. “Due to our legacy we have a number of unique differentiators,” says Langenhoven. “One of our strong points is that we offer cost-effective maintenance and support on legacy systems, a sought-after competency in Southern Africa. We have a very thorough understanding of radar systems, which will stand us in good stead when it comes time to supplying replacement systems.”

Other than that, Tellumat’s black economic empowerment credentials and manufacturing capability leave it uniquely equipped to assist overseas OEMs, whose local contracts often give preference to solutions with local content (local manufacturing capability).

With this in mind, there is scope for considerable growth – estimates range from 15% to more than 100% year-on-year. “It is all project-

based, so it's a bit unpredictable," says Langenhoven.

But since the value of contracts can, at times, be considerable, even low incremental growth can make a big difference to this respected group's bottom line.