

### Diversification

Through R&D, OSS has started to apply tungsten carbide, which is almost twice as stiff as steel, to the surface of its tools to strengthen and prolong their wear-life. It is also exploring the use of tungsten carbide in other highly abrasive surfaces. OSS is hopeful of expanding the industrial applications beyond the O&G industry. It has currently identified two potential customers and is in the process of doing trials.

Moving up the value chain, OSS has been working closely with researchers and independent tool designers since 2016 to develop prototypes for innovative drilling tools that are more efficient and can result in higher yield. The successful commercialisation and production of such proprietary tools will create an additional and sustainable source of revenue for the company.

### Conclusion

OSS is definitely not resting on its laurels. It is seeking to stay ahead by seizing new opportunities to sharpen its competitive edge. Taking advantage of the silver lining in times of adversity has allowed OSS to tap into previously overlooked markets.

"In good times, we were slightly complacent. We didn't need to go around looking for orders. Orders just flowed in. So in this downturn, we innovated our business model and at the same time, looked deep at augmenting our internal capabilities for sustainable growth. We are adapting on various fronts to remain relevant in these dynamic market conditions," says Mr Loh. With its visionary and strategic leadership, OSS is well positioned for greater success.

"Our hard-earned partnerships with our closest clients have paved the way for success in our manufacturing business." -- Mr Kay Ong, Managing Director of Oilfield Services & Supplies Pte Ltd.

## Prime Structures Engineering

### Growth trajectory like that of a bamboo

*Through providing value engineering and customised building envelope solutions, Prime Structures aims to become a multinational corporation by 2020*

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"In business, success is guaranteed through hard work, not luck. You work hard, eventually you'll be lucky," says Mr Sonny Bensily, founder and Managing Director of Prime Structures Engineering Pte Ltd (Prime Structures). Not relying on serendipity, the Prime Structures' spirit is anchored on its determination and willingness to venture into uncharted territories and adapting to different circumstances. This has laid the foundation for the home-grown engineering firm's success and enabled it to hold its own against established international competitors.

From a humble three-employee start-up in March 1995, Prime Structures has grown to become a building envelope solutions group with eight subsidiaries and close to 100 employees. With its global network of strategic alliances and innovative design capabilities, Prime Structures specialised in the design and integration of façade systems to create synergised, state-of-the-art building envelopes for structures such as the Marina Bay Sands integrated resort in Singapore and Okada Manila casino resort and hotel complex in the Philippines.

Prime Structures likens its growth trajectory to that of the bamboo - a plant that takes a long time growing under the ground establishing its root system before it really takes off and starts producing. Its revenue was S\$67.8 million in 2016 but the company is targeting S\$100 million by 2020 and S\$250 million by 2026.



*Founder and Managing Director Mr Sonny Bensily (front row in bow tie) gives the thumbs-up, after receiving Prime Structures' first Enterprise 50 Award in November 2016.*

## Prime Structures Engineering

### The founding story

With his father's blessings and only S\$300 in his pocket, Mr Bensily, now 56, left his Penang home for Singapore to pursue an engineering degree at the Nanyang Technological Institute, now known as Nanyang Technological University. He had received a bursary from the Singapore government for his studies. As the pioneer graduating class of 1985 in Civil and Structural Engineering, he went on to accumulate a decade of experience in engineering, management and marketing by working for various organisations. In March 1995, Mr Bensily started Prime Structures, a small sub-contracting firm in general building construction, design of residential, commercial and industrial buildings, and engineering consultancy services.

### Adapting business models

Many companies in the building and construction industry believe in specialising in their competitive advantage, leaving different parts of the project to others. This resulted in a lack of synergy. Prime Structures saw this service gap and positioned itself as a provider of integrated building envelope solutions, including consulting, design, construction and maintenance services.

Its emphasis is to add value through a customised approach and efficient engineering, ensuring that safety and quality requirements are met on time and within budget. Prime Structures also boasts a robust supply chain and a global network of strategic alliances in Asia and Europe which enables it to tender and execute projects at competitive prices.

Prime Structures operates in a niche market targeting complex façade structures. With a proven track record, good capabilities and financial standing, it is listed under the Building and Construction Authority's highest category of curtain wall contractors, CR16-L6, which allows it to tender for curtain wall projects of unlimited value.

### Built to last

#### **Integrated approach**

Prime Structure's integrated approach lets it take ownership of the building envelope, allowing clients to have peace of mind. It harnesses its vast experience and past learnings to build the iconic building envelopes.



### **Solution creator**

Tapping on its flexibility and combined team experience of over 150 years in façade works, Prime Structures thrives on solving complex engineering challenges while seeking to create value with its innovative and complete building envelope solutions that are built to last. Beyond addressing any immediate project issues, it plans ahead by anticipating and managing contingencies as well as exploring opportunities for value engineering and value creation.

### **Coordinated strategy**

With its experienced project management team, Prime Structures is able to effectively coordinate and communicate with internal and external stakeholders from the project's start to completion. It is committed to ensuring the prompt delivery of projects. It adopts a forward-looking project management approach by monitoring progress actively and getting feedback from all stakeholders.

These brand propositions shape everything that Prime Structures does, whether in assessing new products and services, or in its communication with staff.

### **Marina Bay Sands integrated resort project**

The Marina Bay Sands (MBS) Sky Park, at 340 m long and 200 m above sea level, is one of the largest public cantilevers in the world. The construction of its envelope posed tremendous structural and operational challenges. A customised system had to be in place to install the cladding onto the "ship" in a quick yet safe manner. This deterred many contractors from taking on the challenge.

At the time of the MBS project, Prime Structures' turnover was only S\$17 million but it was vying for contracts worth over S\$60 million. Compared to its competitors, Prime Structures seemed to be biting off more than it could chew. But the company's three attributes - being integrated, a solution creator and having a coordinated team -- saw it clinch the MBS Sky Park project, the Ned Kahn Wall (designed by world renowned environmental artist Ned Kahn) and the MICE (Meeting, Incentive Travel, Conventions and Exhibitions) facilities, all of which added up to about S\$60 million.

Prior to the Marina Bay Sands project, Prime Structures already had projects in countries such as Thailand, Brunei, Sri Lanka and South Africa but it did not have a physical presence there. Overseas projects were done on an on-demand basis. The MBS project became a springboard for Prime Structures as it gained an international network and reputation and became more actively involved in overseas projects.

## **Prime Structures Engineering**

Prime Structures is confident of its abilities to compete with its value-added services while leveraging on Singapore's positive brand name. Venturing overseas also spreads the risks, as Prime Structures is no longer reliant on a single market for its earnings.

Prime Structures has been planting "seeds" throughout the region to expand its reach by having physical offices in those places where the potential for sales are deemed to be high. This approach allows the company to adopt a lean operation which reduces overheads. Currently, Prime Structures has an active presence in Hong Kong, Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

### **Embracing challenges**

One of Prime Structures' main concerns is the financing of its foreign projects. For major projects, clients usually demand a performance bond to guarantee against the failure of meeting stated obligations. However, banks in these foreign countries may not be familiar with Prime Structures and therefore may charge exorbitant rates or may not be willing to extend the facility at all. Although Prime Structures has excellent relationships with local Singapore banks, these lenders tend to adopt a conservative approach towards projects undertaken in countries where they have no presence.

The problem is mitigated, to some extent, by IE Singapore's Internationalisation Finance Scheme (IFS) which allows Singapore banks to co-share the risk of underwriting the bond. However, there is a limit to how much the IFS can cover. Thus, financing is still a major handicap for Prime Structures.

### **Sustaining success with productivity and innovation**

Maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage is not easy. It requires the constant pursuit of innovation and productivity. At Prime Structures, innovation comes from all levels, not just the top management. Several measures are in place to harness the creative ideas of staff, such as brainstorming sessions during team building retreats, department meetings and informal get-togethers. Feedback from clients and vendors are the other sources of information.

Ideas and opinions are sought and put into action. Staff are empowered to work alongside senior management on innovative solutions for tenders and projects. For example, during the tender stage, staff get together to brainstorm how to improve the effectiveness and efficiency for the client given the fixed specifications, quantities, and job duration. Knowing that price competitiveness alone is insufficient to win a tender, they seek to engineer the project to enhance the value delivered in terms of cost, lead-time, aesthetics and other aspects.



*Mr Sonny Bensily (extreme right) and Prime Structures' design team at the company's annual dinner and dance Oktoberfest celebration in 2016.*

The in-house commercial and business development teams are always on the lookout for products that can improve service levels. Combining a robust supply chain and strategic alliances with global manufacturing facilities, Prime Structures is able to tap into the global marketplace to research and procure the best products from countries such as Italy, Vietnam and China. The company also invites close suppliers to conduct regular product information-sharing sessions to provide updates on the latest developments.

Exploring forays into new market segments that require fresh expertise and knowhow is another of Prime Structure's innovative strategy. One such area is security façades. The façade, which is a first line of defense against external elements, is an important aspect in the overall aesthetic and technical performance of a building.

Prime Structures believes that besides defending against natural elements such as the weather, a building should also act as a shield against security threats such as break-ins, explosions and bullets.

Its experience in security façade resolves environmental, structural and security issues to achieve a building that is not just aesthetically appealing but also functional. It supplied the bomb, bullet and intruder-resistant façade materials for the Australian Embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia. The project team is exploring the acquisition of technologies and equipment to develop and expand the security façade business segment.

## Prime Structures Engineering

Aside from innovation, productivity is also of paramount importance. With the help of consultancy firm Ernst & Young, Prime Structures has embarked on the Business Excellence Programme by Spring Singapore to benchmark itself and adopt best practices from around the world. Compared to its industry counterparts, Prime Structures has 12 per cent higher productivity, 14 per cent more profitability and better working conditions. It received the Singapore Quality Class certification in 2015.

### Commitment towards employees

"Staff who play together, stay together," says Mr Bensily. Honouring the sacrifices and efforts of staff who have contributed to the company's success, Prime Structures organises annual incentive trips for deserving staff. Staff and their spouses are invited for an evening of bonding at Prime Structures' Oktoberfest, the theme for its annual dinner & dance party.

On a monthly basis, Prime Structures treats staff to breakfast or dessert to start their day on a positive note. During the haze period, masks were distributed and healthy food provided to improve the health of employees. "When you take care of your staff, your staff will take care of the business," says Mr Bensily, explaining why employees are treated like family.

Prime Structures adopts an open door policy which promotes openness and transparency throughout the organisation. New hires go through a mandatory orientation programme to better understand their career development path and how their role contributes to the company's growth. Training programmes impart the necessary skills so that everyone can learn and grow together with the company, and supervisors conduct bi-annual appraisals to prepare staff for the company's next phase of growth.

### Building towards greater heights

With overseas project experience under its belt and setting its sights on projects of higher value, Prime Structures has recently undergone a rebranding exercise. Its new logo depicts a skyline and the dimensional façades of six skyscrapers, which represents Prime Structures' pride in shaping skylines. Three of the skyscrapers symbolise its three attributes of being Integrated, a Solution Creator and its Coordinated approach. The other three skyscrapers represent the three areas of Skin, Structure and Lighting in its building envelope solutions.

Moving forward, Mr Bensily has one objective -- grow Prime Structures into an MNC by 2020. Prime Structures has an optimistic view about its prospects in the local and foreign markets, with more building renewal projects coming on stream as buildings age.



*The new Prime Structures logo, launched in August 2017, encapsulates its business of shaping skylines.*

Prime Structures' success lies in its ability to keep its operational structure lean. It forges strategic alliances with its supply chain to enjoy competitive rates without compromising on the quality of the building materials used. To further strengthen its competitive edge in building façades, the company is looking to acquire firms horizontally and vertically in the supply chain. Financing needs remain a top priority. It is vital for Prime Structures to maintain a healthy operational cash flow as it ventures overseas. It will be catastrophic if it cannot meet its payments on time. Prime Structures is open to alternative financing options such as raising funds through an IPO or having strategic investors.

"We build our staff, our staff build the business," says Mr Bensily as he affirms the company's belief in continuity by grooming its employees and promoting them internally to senior roles to be the leaders of tomorrow. Currently, the second-generation team manages the strategic business units and succession plans are well in place to propagate the legacy of Prime Structures.

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