

Servest and Atalian joint venture based on shared vision

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Facilities management companies Servest in the UK and France's Atalian have formed a joint venture to enable them to provide integrated FM solutions on a pan-European basis.



The 50/50 owned project, which will operate under the name Atalian Servest Ltd, will look to capitalise on both organisations' reputations in their respective markets and expand their current offer to existing and new customers across country boundaries.

Rob Legge, Servest Group ceo for UK and Europe and Matthieu de Baynast, ceo of International at Atalian speak exclusively to ECJ about their new partnership.

What led to the formation of the new partnership and how are requirements from clients developing? Legge explains: "Several of our retail customers indicated that they wanted to extend our work into Europe to allow them to buy centrally and achieve a more standardised service delivery. This was one of the drivers behind our relationship with Atalian.

"There has also been interest from our Government and commercial clients," he adds. "Cleaning is the dominant service line at the moment, but security, catering and hard services are also proving popular.

"The benefits are clear. The client has a central point of contact across Europe, with one invoice, one set of KPIs and a standardised set of audit scores. This makes the service more efficient and reduces the cost. A standardised approach to the look and feel of a workplace is also important, so a customer can walk into an office in London or Frankfurt and have the same standard of service, look and feel as they would in Madrid or Paris.

"But at the same time, while it may be a pan-European contract it is managed locally, so there's a strong cultural fit on the ground. The local presence understands the local culture and what will and won't work.

"We have also introduced a central management information system. This allows an organisation to analyse its facilities data and spend by office, by country and by region. That way, businesses can understand why they spend more in x country/office than y office. It allows the spread of best practice and for a more uniform approach. It's proved very popular and successful to date."

Matthieu de Baynast explains: "We've seen a trend over the past 10 years for organisations to centralise their facilities services and the joint venture was created in response to that.

"Organisations don't want multiple points of contact around Europe for their FM; they want to speak to one person. Also it helps if that one point of contact is based near the client's procurement team as they will speak the same language and have the same cultural references."

So how are the two companies modifying the way they operate in order to work in tandem across pan-European contracts? We are very similar businesses with similar values and ways of operating so we didn't have to make any large adjustments in order to work together," replies de Baynast.

"We did create a standardised pricing model and created joint marketing material to explain our combined approach. Many of our key opportunities are with existing clients so we are spending time getting to know each other's clients, their different needs and ways of working and adjusting our individual approach accordingly."

Legge continues: "The key thing has been, and will continue to be, we ensure that where best practice is in operation this is spread not just throughout the contract, but also used elsewhere in the business with our other clients. We are increasing our joint focus on innovation to ensure that we share experiences."

There are many aspects to take into consideration when identifying the right partner company with which to start a partnership. What in particular makes these two businesses a suitable fit?

Legge explains: "For me it was about having the right cultural fit with the management team. The first time I met Matthieu we really hit it off and everyone on the combined management team gets on well.

"We share common values and beliefs, which is essential. We have very quickly built up a strong relationship, epitomised by trust and integrity."

De Baynast echoes his sentiments. "Our companies are very similar. They are both privately owned and have both grown very rapidly in recent years through growth and acquisition, and continue to grow. We have a comparable track record.

"We also both self-deliver services wherever possible so we have direct control over the service we deliver to our customers on the ground. That was very important.

"The age of the management team is similar and we get on well. Rob likes French wine, and I enjoy English beer, so it's a good match!"

There are bound to be challenges ahead so what do the two heads of the joint venture see as being the most significant ones? "We need to continuously ensure everything we do is seamless," replies de Baynast. "Whether it's in the UK, France, Belgium or Spain. We must have that same joined-up approach day in, day out. That's our ongoing challenge."

"Our key challenge is now to ensure the strong relationship and shared vision enjoyed by the management team is percolated through both companies to the staff operating on the ground," adds Legge. "We want to ensure that they are walking the shared walk, talking the shared talk."

He concludes: "That's essential for our success and we will be working very hard over the next few months to ensure that happens."

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