

THE RIGHT MOVES AT THE RIGHT TIME

Business Development Director Karim Jan charts his worldwide career and shares his take on life at Subsea 7 and what 'being 7' means to him.



I have two roles within Subsea 7 – Global Account Director and Business Development Director for our Africa, Gulf of Mexico and Mediterranean business. Business development is all about information and relationships. We interface with a very wide range of individual contacts within and around client organisations. What is interesting for one decision-influencer is irrelevant to another, so we have to manage the flow of information very carefully.

Our record of performance is paramount. After decades of experience, Subsea 7 is able to organise large-scale projects that other contractors have difficulty in delivering. This is an incredibly challenging industry – we're only as good as our last job, and the pressures on project staff are significant, since the stakes and challenges are so high.

When we can demonstrate that we are the lowest-risk (and most competent) contractor at a reasonable price, that gives us a real competitive advantage. What we are really selling to our clients is an on-time first oil date, and a useable subsea infrastructure with long-term integrity.

Our success derives from our courage in investing in assets, technology and people. The feedback from clients is that they do appreciate the magnitude of our investments in recent years - not only in the fleet but also in our management of resources. Our ability to demonstrate to clients the competencies of our deck equipment and the staff who operate them is something that sets us apart.

You can never quite remove emotion from the purchasing process. Our clients have successfully mechanised the buying process as the complexity of projects has increased. But, at the end of the day, decisions regarding value for money are often human decisions. If you want reliability and security, you don't always buy on price alone – whether it's the shoes you wear, or the offshore contractor you appoint.

People often think sales and marketing is about aggressive go-getters chasing the "hero" order, but it's actually much more to do with collaboration. All the information we share with clients and influencers has got to be researched, coordinated, layered and validated, and we have always to be mindful of levels of confidentiality.

We have to work in a structured way with a strategy that is as robust as possible, bearing in mind that things keep changing and circumstances can arise that we just haven't been able to consider.

I'm very lucky – I knew from an early age that I wanted to be in a sales role. While still at school in Great Yarmouth (a coastal town in Norfolk, England) I used to work in a local store selling electrical appliances. I was always interested in electronics, and went on to study electrical and electronic engineering.

But Great Yarmouth in the 1970s was a busy support base for the North Sea oil and gas industry. I could see who was bringing the prosperity into the town.

So I moved to London working in the marine and offshore industries with lots of travel to West Africa. Then I worked for an Aberdeen company with responsibilities in the Middle East as well as Brazil. I could see the huge potential of the Brazilian market so, as soon as I could, I learned to speak Portuguese.

Even better, I met my wife Monike in Brazil, which was definitely a life-changing bonus.

We've been happy wherever we've been located. As a city, Aberdeen has a real get-up-and-go attitude, which I found very stimulating – plus it has the great Scottish hills on its doorstep and some excellent golf courses. Brazil was very vibrant and exciting - really prepared to take risks with new technology, even to countenance individual failure along the way in pursuit of its energy goals.

Africa is, quite simply, fascinating, while Houston is the enormous world energy hub – but without the hills! A very exciting environment with stacks of valuable and stimulating face-time with highly knowledgeable oil and gas people.

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