

Service with a smile

As Khidmah approaches the second anniversary of its business unit, Khadamati Services, fmME speaks to supervisor Kristina Kastratovikj to look at its 2011 goal

In the last two years, Khidmah has grown its services and portfolio of residential properties under its facilities and property management division.

Owing to demand from residents for domestic and day to day services for their homes, it set up Khadamati Services in December 2009 and now caters to more than 2,000 properties across Dubai and Abu Dhabi as well as a number of buildings in the Western Region providing services on behalf of landlords.

Customers can be found in freehold residential projects such as the villas of Golf Gardens, Abu Dhabi, Lake Shore Tower and MAG 214 in JLT, Dubai.

It also has leasehold residential projects in Sas Al Nakhl Village and Khalidiya Residential Village in Abu Dhabi and Al Oyoum Village in Al Ain as well as the offices of Abu Dhabi Judiciary department, and 'Doctors without Borders'.

"The best part about launching Khadamati, which means 'My Services' in Arabic was that the groundwork had already been done and we knew through the requests received by our call centre that there was a latent demand for the extra services on our properties," said Kristina Kastratovikj, Khadamati supervisor.

Requests varied from installing a chandelier, to needing a carpenter, cleaning a swimming pool to grass cutting, pest control and fixing a fly net or window shades.

"By creating an independent business unit within the company, providing a one stop shop for domestic and maintenance services for residents, we needed to plan which services we would be offering various properties, setting up a price structure, financial analysis and a marketing strategy," added Kastratovikj.

"We also needed to educate our call centre agents to deal with the calls, as they had to play a vital role in the implementation of the communication and marketing strategy. Overall, a lot of things had to



Workers at Khadamati Services provide landscaping for customers including grass and lawn cutting.

be in place in a very short space of time. From its inception we have been experiencing growth on a daily basis."

New projects

In addition to its current properties, Khadamati will be providing services to the newly built Sun and Sky Towers on Reem

Island as well as the Al Yakut Tower.

"We are very excited to be a vital part of the handover and management of Sun and Sky Towers as part of the Shams project, Abu Dhabi," said Kastratovikj.

"The towers are one of the most prestigious developments in Abu Dhabi. Sorouh, the developer, has created more than 1,000

residential units plus commercial spaces, as well as a retail section in the form of a mall on the first two floors of the towers.

"The handover of the units started last month. This is an exciting time and the towers have created a huge potential for Khadamati services. The promotion of the services commenced during the period of resident inspection and de-snagging of the units and our services are available both for the owners and the tenants in the form of planned preventative maintenance packages, handyman services, housekeeping, Easy Home services with special offers

and rates from our suppliers for services like interior furnishing or kitchen appliances," she added.

The team of Khadamati sits under the larger Facilities Management department within Khidmah. Each project has its own FM team including co-coordinators, team leaders, HVAC technicians, electricians, plumbers, general technicians, gardeners, swimming pool cleaning teams, housekeeping teams, pest control technicians and general cleaners.

The ratio of the staff which is handling Khadamati varies from property to

property, depending upon the amount of requests it receives, as well as whether the property is leasehold or freehold, as it has both in its portfolio.

In some properties, such as Golf Gardens, it has an emergency, planned preventative maintenance and reactive teams.

In the leasehold properties such as Sal Al Nakhl it has a team which assists in the delivery of individual services, such as handyman or pest control. The reactive and planned preventative maintenance is under the community FM team. "Putting the business unit in place and implement-



ing all the processes and procedures and experiencing the growing pains of a new sector has been one of the most challenging things I have ever experienced," said Kastratovikj. "Abu Dhabi property market, as opposed to the Dubai market, has not had much experience of this type of project and structure of service we were providing. The challenges vary from educating residents that certain services are chargeable on their property to raising the satisfaction level of services.

"In addition, should properties require any remedial work that is outside the

responsibility of Khidmah, this will require landlord approval, which is sometimes difficult to obtain for a variety of reasons and can take time, which leaves us being unable to rectify the problem within the timescale required by the occupant.

"We have had the challenge of implementing varying payment options such as e-payment and onsite payments which were new systems for this type of service. In addition, from an operational viewpoint, scheduling staff, services, specific tenant availability and access to properties was, and remains a daily challenge."

Kastratovikj takes time out to discuss projects with her team.



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Dubai strata law

According to Kastratovikj, understanding the Dubai Strata Law and interest shown from owners is increasing on a daily basis.

She said that in Dubai, where the rental returns have reduced and valuations have dropped it's important that as a company it tells clients how to prolong the life of an asset and how to reduce the overall cost of that asset's lifecycle.

"In Dubai, properties have had interim owners associations (IOA) for more than two years and are well informed on what their service charge covers in relation to the common spaces and their responsibilities of freehold areas," she said.

"In these developments there is normally less questioning of 'why' planned maintenance services are required and more on what value we can deliver. In developments where the interim owners association is formed or where the defect liability period is recently completed, we have more questions on why their service charges do not cover their freehold property.

"In this instance myself, the team and even our call centre have to educate the owner and tenant on their responsibilities.

"When it comes to Abu Dhabi it is different because the law is not at the same level as Dubai yet but as a company we are complying with the Dubai Strata Law for all our freehold properties.

"Each Freehold property, therefore, has its own interim owner's association board and they have learned the value of expressing their opinion on behalf of others and actively contributing to the management and upkeep of their community.

KHADAMATI SERVICES

Khadamati Services is part of Khidmah Property Services Management, offering preventative and general maintenance services for the home.

It was launched in December 2009 and includes:

- Handyman and individual services (pool cleaning, lawn care, pest control, etc).
- Easy Home services (shades, fly nets, interior design, landscaping, etc).
- Housekeeping
- PPM (planned preventative maintenance).



Khadamati Services maintains and carries out pool cleaning duties on behalf of its customers.

"Within our company we have a team which is dedicated to interacting with the board members and owners.

"Meetings are organised and everything is taken into consideration. Our Property Management and Facilities Management team has worked with the IOA and all the owners on transparency with the service charges and demonstrating what is and what is not covered.

"The owners have generally been very eager to learn more about the forthcoming Strata Law and what kind of impact it will have on a development.

"In Abu Dhabi where rental returns are still moderate, there are many cases where residents want to live in well maintained homes. The residents look for developments where landlords provide a greater level of service from maintenance through to landscaping of the grounds.

"We all have knowledge of and understand the Strata Law, therefore many of us can answer questions connected to this if it is raised by the residents.

"It is very interesting that the tenants are also interested to know more about the same, and I have noticed a trend that they tend to speak more often to the landlords

14,000
calls a month are received by the 24/7
Khidmah Call Centre

70
The number of pools cleaned a day by
Khadamati Services

knowing that they have the power to influence the management of the community and services provided."

As well as expanding into remote areas of the Western Region of the UAE, Khadamati has introduced a GPS tracking system in all its vehicles.

The system allows staff to track, monitor and control its teams in real time and its call centre can dispatch men closest to a development based on their location.

It is now looking at implementing this system across all of its other divisions to better utilise the technicians across all fields and related customer services.

Challenges

Kastratovikj said one of its greatest challenges during the first year was communicating what it was trying to do to customers and it is currently implementing a new SMS system for residents where they will be notified of anything that concerns their property through an SMS message on their mobile phone.

"Targeted communication is a valuable asset to any company, especially when you are in the services business," she said.

"Residents have the right to be advised of everything which is connected to the services they receive; whether that is the scheduling and rescheduling of work or a delay due to supplier delivery.

"We deal with such a wide and differing portfolio of residents. It's very challenging to meet everyone's expectations, which is why we take customer feedback very seriously and act on it accordingly.

"Being able to work on this project and set this up from within the company from the beginning and grow the Khadamati Services to the point where it is at today gives me great satisfaction.

"It's a challenging job at times but ultimately very rewarding." **IMM**



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