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Tailor made

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Geoff Shrewry, Transguard's new deputy managing director tells us what makes his company's services so special.



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Transguard's new deputy managing director, Geoff Shrewry, plans to expand the business by providing customers with specialised services. fmME finds out how

Established as a support service provider to the Emirates Group in 2001, Transguard has grown into the region's biggest facilities management and security services company, counting Emirates airlines, Emaar, Atlantis hotel, and eight out of the UAE's top ten banks as its customers. Its new deputy managing director Geoff Shrewry has been in the job just five months, yet has already put plans in place to grow the business and show 'visible leadership' to his staff of 20,000 employees.

"I want to get in amongst the people and make sure I'm aware of what's going on, make sure they know who's running the business," said Shrewry, "but I'm struggling with that at the moment," he said. "How do you actually get that visible leadership; how do you get that feeling into the business?"

Part of the solution, Shrewry believes, will lie in getting out and meeting people. "I've done quite a bit of that already. I might meet 30, 40 people in a day, but if you work out how long it's going to take to get to everyone..... impossible."

Another priority will be using Transguard's internal communications network to open new channels for staff to interact with him, and each other. "That's a big drive for me and something that we'll be working hard on now. I'll do it slightly differently to how I've done it in the past."

Though Shrewry's career experience has trained him well for the new challenges that await him, he admits that managing such a large workforce will be a new test of his leadership skills. "When you're talking about 20,000 staff – that scale is so difficult to comprehend. It doesn't determine how I run the business, but it's the greatest challenge I've got personally."

Prior to taking up his position at Transguard, Shrewry headed the Middle



Transguard facilities management and security services company employs up to 20,000 people.

East operations of facilities management company Emrill, where his duties included changing the culture of the company to resemble a more Westernised model. Having started his career as a civil engineer, Shrewry moved into project management for Forte Hotels, before moving on to general management and eventually taking a role as managing director for Romec in the late 1990s. The following decade saw him take responsibility for 12,000 staff at Reliance and assume the role of culture change director at Carillion.

It was during his time at Romec that Shrewry worked with Mike McGeever, who would become managing director of Transguard. "We worked very well together all those years ago; really complemented each other's skills," he said. "When he

invited me to join him here, it was one of those invitations you don't turn down."

Since joining Transguard in January, Shrewry has started to supplement his existing management team, focussing on bringing in more leadership, management and training expertise to lead the company's growth. "We've got a very strong management team already, but we did have a few gaps where I thought we could have some new skills," he said. "We've got a couple of people coming in at senior level over the next couple of weeks, which is very exciting. They will be concentrating on developing our supervisors and raising the skill base of our first-line managers.

"If you're growing the business you first have to make sure you have people in place at the top end who can live with the vision

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and go with the strategy you've created. Adding people too late is a big problem, so we've got a couple of people starting at a senior level, and that will put the team in place."

One of the senior management team's main responsibilities will be to train supervisors, middle managers and front-line staff. "That's the centre of my training programme," said Shrewry. "People usually become supervisors because they're very good at their job, but they are never trained to be supervisors.

"If you start training people to do the job properly at that level, it will only result in enhancing the overall customer experience. There's absolutely no doubt about that in my mind."

The training drive will consolidate the "fully detailed" people plan Transguard already has in place for developing and retaining its staff. In time, Shrewry believes this will extend employees' average employment tenure of three years by eighteen months.

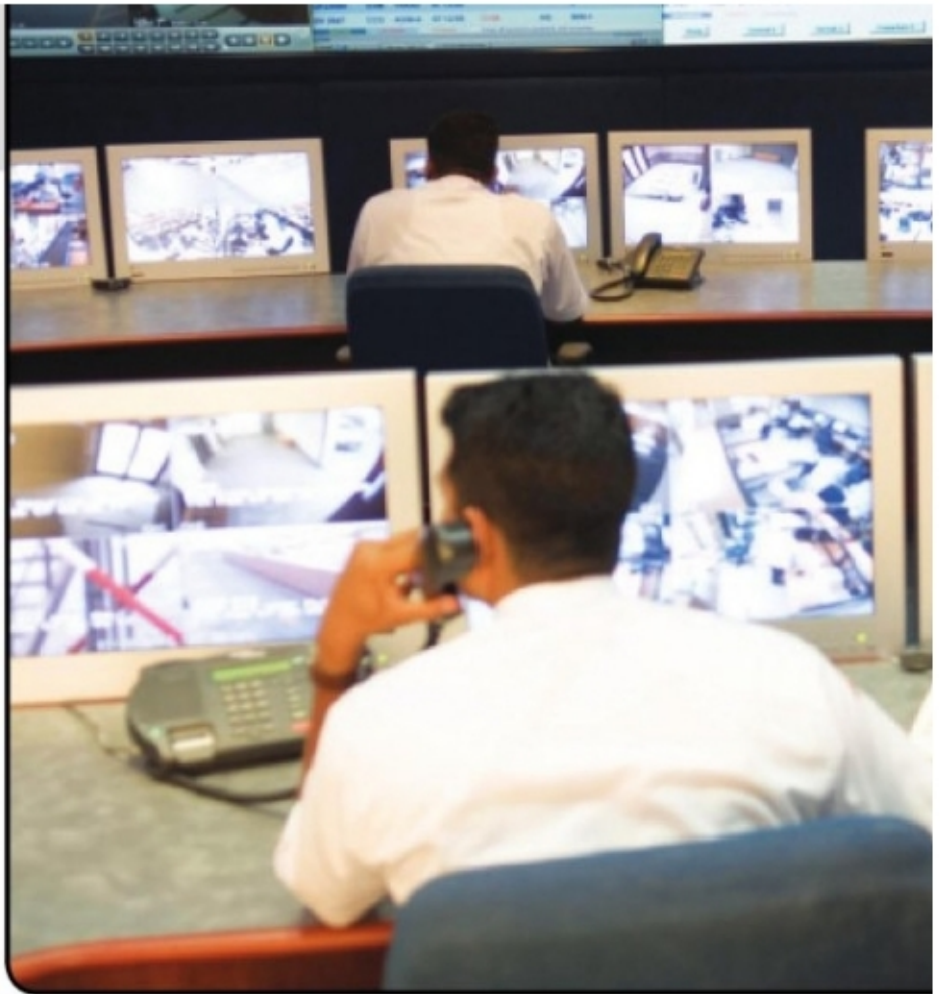
"We want to be a place people join because it's a good place to work. I want to get another year or 18 months out of someone because they can see a career path; they can see a career that gives them more skills. That's what it's about – enhancing their skills and helping us to grow."

Improving the customer experience will be another one of Shrewry's main challenges as deputy managing director. In a company whose services span facilities management, cash management, security technology and training, FM consultancy, airport services and events management, finding the right person to deal with can take time, he admitted.

"Because of the scale of the operation and what we deal with, customers usually talk to five or six different people at Transguard, as opposed to a single point of contact. That's something that we are going to have to address."

Transguard employees, he continued, "have worked a little bit in silos", an approach which he aims to change. "We've got to be much more joined up as a business in what we're offering our customers so that there's one point of contact for whatever services customers are after.

"That is something that we're going to have to work very hard at. If we have



Improving the customer experience will be another one of Shrewry's main challenges to grow Transguard.

AED700 m

Annual turnover

80%

Of business is from external clients

20,000

Employees established in 2001

a single point of contact, I'm absolutely convinced this will lead to us generating more business."

The main difficulty in realising this change, he admitted, will come from a lack of trust among Transguard staff. "People get very precious about their customer and their relationship, and we've got to do things slightly differently. We've got

to think more about what it's like for the customer rather than what it's like for us."

When the single point of contact is introduced, business will increase through existing customers more than new contracts, as customers who have one contact for a range of services will likely use more services than those who regularly deal with five or six people.

"We have to act as a single business rather than a collection of different services," Shrewry explained, referring specifically to Transguard's cash management contracts with many of the UAE's leading banks.

"We traditionally haven't cross-sold our other products. We are already a trusted agent – we look after their cash – and we should be using that to grow the business. But how can we provide a service that's tailored to their needs?"

Shrewry believes the answer lies in taking advantage of Transguard's market leading position in the FM market. "We have a lot to offer, and not many other companies come even near our scale. We have to provide a tailored service for individual customers, picking them off one by one and



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Transguard currently provides tellers to its bank customers to bring them closer to being fully integrated.

developing the accounts. Because we're so strong and have a very good brand, we're in a very good position to do that."

By establishing a single point of contact for customers, and cross-selling the company's products and services, Shrewry will come closer to realising his ultimate goal for Transguard: to be the first provider of truly integrated facilities management in the Middle East. An integrated facilities management contract – whereby a company's receptionists, security guards, administrative staff and cleaners, to name a few – are all outsourced, allows the company to concentrate on its core competencies and reduce costs such as recruitment and work visas.

"There are very few contracts that are fully integrated in the Middle East," said Shrewry. "In Abu Dhabi, when you talk about facilities management, they think of cleaning. In Dubai, there's a greater understanding of the concept, but there's still a long way to go.

"We provide many services, but it's almost on a pick and mix basis. I'd like to get to a position where every single person

"If we have a single point of contact, I'm absolutely convinced this will lead to us generating more business."

who is non-core is a Transguard person working on one contract."

The difficulty in making integrated FM more widespread in the region, Shrewry added, will be in trying to convince clients to trust staff who do not technically work for them. "Until that barrier is broken in Dubai, that type of feeling is going to be difficult to overcome."

There are enlightened customers in Dubai, however, who could take the first steps towards full integration. "It's a matter of getting together with them and taking bite-sized chunks – slowly build up the services within our client base to the point where they end up being fully integrated."

Transguard currently provides tellers

to its bank customers, a service bringing them close to full integration. "It needs a customer who's got a long-standing relationship with us, who trusts the company. We've got a few of those, and I think it's just a matter of finding the right one who says 'yes, let's try it.'"

Though Shrewry is planning to grow Transguard's business through offering more services, he does not discount the possibility of attracting new clients in Dubai and regional markets. "We've had enquiries from companies and clients in Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, all wanting us to go there. It's nice to feel that our brand is strong, but I don't think we'd do it on a whim – it's going to have to be something pretty exciting and long term for us to really go for."

The market in the United Arab Emirates, he continued, remains far from saturated and promises further growth for Transguard. "There's no doubt Dubai is already leading the way in facilities management in the Middle East; we're doing exceptionally well and the market opportunity in the UAE is still vast." **fmME**