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Mark Wheeler, head of expert witness provider Diales, discusses the launch of the brand in the Middle East

PROVIDING EXPERT WITNESSES FOR THE construction industry, Diales celebrated its regional launch at a gala event in the Burj Al Arab on November 29. Owned by UK-based Driver Group, Diales is a network of experts in the fields of arbitration, litigation and alternative dispute resolution (ADR). The group is in the process of rolling out Diales across the world, having already launched the brand in Europe and Asia-Pacific.

The man at the helm of Diales, Mark Wheeler, has over 25 years of engineering experience in the construction industry. A trained mechanical and electrical engineer, Wheeler has undertaken a range of building services installations in commercial buildings, on both a pre-designed and design and build basis.

Wheeler has acted as an expert witness in technical, mechanical and electrical matters, and quantum disputes. He has also been instructed as an expert in NEC3 contract disputes, from both a project management and quantum perspective, and advised on the correct application of NEC3 contracts, including highways and remediation projects.

Diales is part of the Driver Group. How do both entities complement each other?

When you have a dispute, or even just a real problem project, you need two things. Firstly, a world-class expert, respected in his or her field, who can give top quality advice. Secondly, you need to have a really good backup team of staff who can deliver the support needed to put into action the expert’s recommendations. Diales gives the world-class experts, the rest of the group provides the unrivalled support.

How has the group developed in recent years?

Our business has doubled as a group over the last four years. This has been delivered by organic growth and by acquisition. We have also established ourselves in new regions. This ongoing strategy will see us continue to grow, as the success of initiatives like Diales is helping us to attract the very best new talent to join the team.

Which services constitute the majority of revenue?

All of the Diales projects are expert witness commissions,



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instructed by clients or their lawyers. Within this volume of work, I would say around 60% of revenue relates to quantum, the calculation of sums due or not due by skilled quantity surveyors. Perhaps 35% relates to delay analysis work, often a forensic review of what happened and when. The final 5% is made up of technical work – defining why something has failed or does not perform to expectations, and identifying technical remedies in mechanical and electrical works.

What is your background, and when did you first get involved with Diales?

My background is in mechanical and electrical, both technical and quantum. Most of my work is currently based on quantum, but knowledge of the technical side is invaluable. I was involved with Diales from its inception. I remember the work that went into creating this brand and settling on the name, as well as our original London launch party.

What are the main reasons for Diales launching in the Middle East?

The Middle East has been a big part of the Driver Group

business for many years, and is a very important region to us. Diales is a key global company, and a launch in the Middle East will ensure that the region is covered by our global brand for top level expertise. It is a region which features a number of the world's highest value, most technical projects. Inevitably there will be problems that are difficult to solve. What better place to offer the market a world-leading team of construction experts?

How many staff work in the Middle East, and what are the main skill sets?

The Middle East team for Driver is now over 120 people, with four of the Diales team permanently living in the Middle East. A further 10 regularly work in the Middle East, but are based in other locations. Diales is very much a global team, and it's about finding the right person, not the nearest. Our Middle East-based experts will also work globally, giving them a world-class reputation.

What makes Diales different from your competitors?

There are a number of firms offering expert services in the Middle East, some based here and some travelling in and out. Mostly they are a tiny part of a larger consultancy. We are different because Diales is at the core of what we do, not a bolt-on. Our group staff all have access to the Diales team, which gives them the best advice to plug into. The Diales team has constant live project access, making it very aware of current market trends. We also quality assure our team members – it can take senior staff several years to pass the tests we put in place to join the team. Many of our experts are published authors in their specific field, and we have training provided each year from external sources including QCs. Diales is also the only team I know that can provide technical experts in building and engineering, in addition to quantum and delay analyst support.

Does the Middle East construction industry have a good understanding of arbitration and litigation?

I think in many parts of the world, there is a sound understanding of arbitration and litigation; we train our experts to understand the processes and what is expected of them. I do think that often we are instructed much later than we could be. A good expert can add real focus if brought in at an early stage, before costs have become a major issue, and give an evaluation that can help to resolve things much quicker.

What will be the main challenges for the group, specific to the region?

As Driver Consult Middle East we are very well established already, with four offices in the region. I think the challenge will be in getting the region's law firms into the habit of visiting our expert profiles on the Diales website every time they are looking for an expert. I am very confident that once they have worked with our team, they will keep coming back. ●

Mark Wheeler has over 25 years of experience in the construction industry.