



As featured in
The CEO Magazine
For more info visit
theceomagazine.com

KNOWLEDGE, RELIABILITY, and EXPERTISE

A company employing about 125 people across several states took shape in New South Wales following the meeting of minds of two estimators in the late 1990s.

Images by Scott Ehler

Qualified plumbers Peter McDonnell and Guy Considine recognised a gap in the market and in 1996 joined forces to form a company they incorporated in 2000 as McDonnell Considine Contracting. A couple of years later, when a third partner joined, the name was changed to McDonnell Considine Digby Pty Ltd.

The goal from the outset was to provide a professional, dedicated, and competitive service to various plumbing divisions, with the focus switching in more recent years to the commercial, industrial, and facilities plumbing maintenance sector.

The enterprise has grown rapidly since 2000 and now, trading as

Australian Facilities Group, is well known throughout the facilities maintenance, plumbing, fire protection, and land management sectors for its willingness to go well beyond its competitors to provide its clients with the best possible service.

“We decided in the late 90s, before starting the company as it is today, we would no longer work within the building sector per se, simply because builders inherently can be challenging to deal with from a subcontract level,” Peter says. “We made a strategic decision that we would go in a different direction, which was facilities management and maintenance. So from 2000 on, that’s really all we did—facilities maintenance, initially plumbing. In 2006, we changed our trading name to MCD

Hydraulics. The catalyst was we didn’t advertise and only worked for a select group of government and commercial clients. We changed our name primarily to stop the public, or domestic sector, calling us—because we didn’t work within that area. We purely targeted facilities maintenance.

“That worked quite well because ‘hydraulic’ is essentially what the plumbing system in commercial and high rise is, and the public didn’t distinguish between the two. We traded as MCD Hydraulics from 2006 through to about February last year. We strategically decided to change our name to Australian Facilities Plumbing. That was surrounding our major Commonwealth contract being up for re-tender across the country. We were successful in re-securing >





the contract in several states and have continued to establish and develop a great working partnership with our clients, such as Brookfield Global Integrated Solutions.”

Eventually, the business added supplementary sectors—fire protection in 2009 and land management in 2014—and expanded some of its New South Wales operations into Victoria and Tasmania. To encompass the changes, it registered as Australian Facilities Group (AFG).

Peter and Guy had similar experience before forming the first company, having predominantly worked for themselves since the early 90s. At almost daily meetings over coffee, the partners encourage senior staff to outline any concerns or issues they see arising, including any centred on safety. “One of the things we’ve learned along the way is we have a lot of really skilled and experienced people working for us. I know it’s a bit of a cliché, but we’re not here to do their jobs,” Peter says.

“We don’t micromanage. We let people do what they need to do, and if they do their job well, then we leave them alone. We’re not experienced in every facet. I think that’s one of our assets, because I don’t think people who can’t let

go and let people do their jobs can grow.”

All AFG’s growth has been organic, without a specific strategy in place. For example, it opened its Victorian office in 2007 at the request of its largest client, Brookfield Johnson Controls, who had won a Commonwealth contract there and knew that AFG, with its proven record in New South Wales, could deliver the services it required.

It was a similar story with the expansion into fire protection. A client, unhappy with the service offered by a provider, asked AFG to consider it. The business investigated, hired the appropriate people, and opened another division of operation. The partners have always run a strong business from a cash perspective and have rarely considered borrowing. “For us, we’ve always reinvested in the business,” Peter says.

“Not having large borrowings hanging over our heads has probably helped us in many ways and has been one of our keys to success. We’ve always had a vision that this is a long-term investment, so when others have made lifestyle choices and invested their money elsewhere, we’ve used ours to reinvest over many years. This



“We make it a priority for our clients to have an awareness of who we are and also our management team.”

- Peter McDonnell

really paid off, especially in the early days.”

AFG treats clients as business partners rather than just people it works for. Peter and Guy are hands on, and their proactive approach aims to anticipate and resolve any questions or potential issues clients perceive. “We don’t sit in our office and never go to site,” Peter says. “We make it a priority for our clients to have an awareness of who we are and also our management team. We hold a monthly meeting with most of our clients, be it at their request or ours, so there is constant dialogue. They have not only trust but confidence in us. We say to our employees that our job is to make our clients’ jobs easier and instil confidence in them so we don’t let them, the client, down. We never have and we never will.”

With its desire to exceed expectations, AFG quickly determines clients’ needs and aims to be able to respond quickly when conditions change. To do this effectively, it knows it must have the backing of its key suppliers, who need to be available whenever their products or services are required.

Strong relationships are developed with key account managers within their supply bases, so there is always mutual understanding, agreement, and trust. The suppliers realise the geography AFG works within—from Tasmania to Tweed Heads and out to the South Australian border—and supports the business in a timely manner when assistance is required. “I think they realise our clients are

not ‘Joe average’, and I guess their support for us flows through to the consistency we have with them,” Peter says. “We don’t chop and change suppliers on a regular basis. We always work in partnership with them.”

The training and development of all staff is also a major focus at AFG. That goes from a new apprentice through to any staff approaching retirement. There is no distinction, and it’s a continual process. The company’s simple philosophy, which it instils in staff from their first day is: If it’s not safe, don’t do it.

“We have an in-house health and safety manager, and through training and development it’s a continual improvement process for all employees,” Peter says. “We like to be ahead of any requirements a client might perceive or need. In doing so, we invest in training and the best equipment to allow employees to carry out all tasks in a safe and effective manner.”

“But it all goes back to our old statement. If something needs to be done but can’t be done in a safe manner, then we will find a way to do it safely. We won’t proceed until we have either the correct equipment or training in place.”

AFG’s future looks assured, with long-term contracts mapped out with current clients for most of the next decade. Peter says there might be opportunities to consider, such as partnering with other companies or engaging in acquisitions, but for now AFG is in a happy place.

“We’ve long toyed with going to Perth, we’ve looked at some prospects in New Zealand, and we probably will grow again within our current sectors of work,” Peter says. “There are a lot of opportunities available, but in the next couple of years it’s really about consolidating what we’ve got—but we’re always open to opportunities.”

“We like to be ahead of any requirements a client might perceive or need. In doing so, we invest in training and the best equipment to allow employees to carry out all tasks in a safe and effective manner.”

- Peter McDonnell



ALL THE BIG BRANDS ARE AT GWS MACHINERY

AGCO
25
YEARS
1990-2015



 MASSEY FERGUSON



 FENDT



 ISEKI

GWS Machinery offer total solutions for municipal and grounds care applications to help you get the job done more efficiently.

Contact the team at GWS Machinery today!

 GWS
MACHINERY

5 Walker St, South Windsor, NSW 2756, Australia
Ph: 4557 4622 www.gwsmachinery.com.au

Leading the Way. Fearlessly.  AGCO

MASSEY FERGUSON® and FENDT® are worldwide brands of AGCO.