

Hayleys Fentons-Pioneering the Future of the MEP Industry in Sri Lanka

By Nuzla Rizkiya

With a history of more than 100 years of engineering excellence, Hayleys Fentons is widely considered one of the most competent and trusted engineering companies in Sri Lanka.

Director of Business Development of Hayleys Fentons, Roshani Dharmaratne recently sat down with the Sunday Times to discuss the company's achievements, plans for the way forward, and the context of the Engineering industry in Sri Lanka.

Following are the excerpts of the discussion.

With its century of experience, Fentons is a renowned brand in the engineering sphere in Sri Lanka having successfully executed many industrial-level projects. Tell us how Hayleys Fentons contributes to the local Engineering industry.

As you rightly said, Hayleys Fentons is an established brand in the engineering industry with a storied history in Sri Lanka. The company was known as an Electro-Mechanical solutions provider with services predominantly revolving around electrical, Extra Low Voltage (ELV), and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) related solutions.

The company evolved its strategy to cater to our clients' increasing need for a one-stop turnkey solution provider. Fentons is the first and the largest company in Sri Lanka to offer MEP engineering expertise on an industrial scale.

The Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing (MEP) portion of a structure are its vital organs. Such services generally account for 30% of total project resources. Hence, engaging multiple contractors to cover each service individually can be tedious, especially in terms of time and cost.

When a client engages a single professional service provider they will benefit from a more unified, efficiently executed project and greater convenience upon completion. A unified solutions provider will have a comprehensive understanding of the systems, and how they integrate and serves as a convenient singular point to ensure essential maintenance, and timely upgrades thus expanding the lifetime of the structure. As a turnkey MEP solutions provider, Fentons offers all the above facilities under one single contract.

Our partnership with more than 100 world-renowned brands, together with our track record has enabled Fentons to offer a comprehensive product and service portfolio and make an immense contribution to uplifting industry standards.

Over the past years, Sri Lanka has seen some of its worst times. The Easter attacks, the Covid pandemic, and the economic crisis that followed, almost led the country to a halt. How has the situation been for Hayleys Fentons?

The strength of the company to navigate three years of unprecedented situations comes from being part of the Hayleys conglomerate. With their support, synergies and governance, we have continued essential operations despite lockdowns and curfews, fulfilling our obligations to our customers.

While the pandemic restricted most organizations from conducting business as usual, heavily impacting the workforce, we placed priority on the financial well-being of our employees. As an essential service provider to numerous commercial and government infrastructures, we proactively handled every aspect of day-to-day operations. We secured employee mobility and accommodation, enabling business continuity in a bid to keep the industry alive.

With hopes for good times, it is ideal to be prepared for challenges and tough times ahead. What are strategies that Hayleys Fentons is prepared with for the future?

Operating a business in today's economic context is extremely risky. Diversification in terms of products, services, and operations will enable us to spread this risk and cater to a wider range of opportunities.

Sri Lankan enterprises are finding it challenging to invest on their own due to high finance costs, lack of material and equipment, and dollar restrictions. We are interested in attracting foreign direct investments through projects that bring in dollar revenue to the country. We will focus on solutions that appear to be the need of the hour. Having access to a wide range of products, Fentons is uniquely capable of providing timely solutions in this ever-challenging environment.

Our NexGen Engineering Studio provides comprehensive design and drafting solutions from the initial design process, to tendering and up to the final finish. Our services include 2D-3D visualization, rendering effects, etc. allowing customers to visualize their premises even before the first stone is laid for physical construction.

We are also evaluating future expansion in Solar renewables, trading, and expansion overseas. The latest development in our expansion overseas is the establishment of our presence in the Maldives.

How can Hayleys Fentons support corporations that are interested in architectural MEP services?

Today, corporations are focused on solutions embedded with the latest technologies. Fentons supports them by helping them deal with maintenance, troubleshooting issues promptly, and providing comprehensive solutions. This is because we have a large pool of engineering experts over 500 specifically dealing with individual components of a building. Our team is able to access experience from our heritage of over 100 years in MEP engineering with the latest know-how, be it fire, Air Conditioning, Plumbing or Electrical.

We place a heavy emphasis on innovation and are fully equipped with knowledge, resources, and partners to provide cutting-edge technology to our clientele.

In Sri Lanka, the engineering industry is recognized as a thrust sector with significant export earnings potential and the ability to support some of the major export industries in the country. Give us an insight into where you feel the industry is heading.

An emerging factor is the process of value engineering which explores different approaches to project implementation within the allocated BOQ. Cost is a huge variable, especially in the present context. Quality and reliability continue to rank high, while sustainability and ROI, are gradually becoming major performance indications.

Being in the industry for over 100 years, Fentons has established its confidence and assurance in quality and sustainability to the world. One might have noticed the dramatic boost in the construction sector in Sri Lanka post-2015. Skyrises and buildings were built at a rapid pace in commercial cities. Many of these construction projects were taken over by foreign entities that were equipped enough to handle them. We are determined to capture these opportunities as a local company and keep the business within Sri Lanka and continue to upskill our people to be on par with the best in the world.

The ongoing predicament has led to a significant increase in migration levels, with an exodus of talented and skilled young professionals, who seek career opportunities outside the country. This brain drain will adversely impact the country and organisations. Fentons looks forward to supporting young, motivated and dynamic individuals whom we believe are critical resources to build a career in the field to retain them in the country.