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Sustainable growth

From humble beginnings, Otto Poon has grown ATAL Engineering Group into an industry leader, known for its engineering expertise, sustainable and innovative approach.

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Today, ATAL Engineering Group incorporates 16 electrical and mechanical engineering companies, spanning construction, infrastructure, healthcare engineering, lifts and elevators, integrated ICT solutions, energy management engineering and green building solutions.

It has a combined turnover of more than HK\$5.5 billion and is recognised as a leading provider of engineering solutions.

Yet, there was a stage when founder Otto Poon was a young man desperate to gain a foothold in the industry. After spending five years as a government apprentice, he became determined to land a role in the UK and wrote to numerous companies, seeking an opportunity. Two or three replied to say they had no openings. Only one replied to Otto confirming employment without an interview. “They offered me a chance to work in the UK. To me, that was almost a miracle. »



“When I worked as an engineer, I always looked at how I could make a product or design more efficient and effective.”

This concern about overconsumption was something that Otto thought about a lot in his day-to-day life. He would sometimes ask friends how many pairs of shoes they owned, or how many dresses they had bought. “They were always a little bit embarrassed,” he recalls. “It made them realise that we’re consuming too much, buying to an extent that is beyond the world’s regenerative capacity.”

He soon incorporated this thinking into his work. “When I worked as an engineer,” Otto says, “I always looked at how I could make the product or design more efficient and effective. I thought about how I could use less material, save on energy and operating costs, and be more environmentally friendly.”

This approach became a habit and a defining feature of ATAL Engineering Group’s work. Otto soon got involved with professional bodies in the field and became a regular fixture at industry forums, where he would speak about sustainable engineering. “I established a small reputation as an advocate for the environment, energy and sustainable development.” He further developed this expertise chairing government committees on energy and sustainable development, and by attending United Nations conferences on Climate Change. ATAL formed partnerships with Tsinghua University and Jiao Tong University, developing some proprietary technologies out of these collaborations which embrace environmental ideals. This has included a number of patents on a process that allows users to treat their water flow with less chemicals and a better use of energy.

ATAL Engineering Group also benefitted from having the agility to move where the market took it. Customers wanted the business to provide service for the equipment it sold, so that’s what it did. Then, Otto heard customer feedback about including installation services, so it again expanded to offer this to its clients. “I happily became a contractor,” Otto says.

“That was really the turning point,” Otto continues. “I worked and studied, and in five years I was a qualified electrical and mechanical engineer. It was a very humble beginning and a lot of hard work, but I achieved my goal as a professional engineer.”

After a few years in the UK, Otto returned to Hong Kong to be closer to his parents, and shortly after he started ATAL Engineering Group as a trading company. It imported and sold mechanical, electrical and environmental equipment to a booming Hong Kong. The company started doing business in 1978 and Otto modestly suggests the fortuitous timing was a major boost. “That was an extremely good time to start. China had just decided to open up to the world, to build industry. It gave us many opportunities.”

It wasn’t just timing, however, that set the company apart from its competitors. The company’s approach has always been to use its engineering knowhow to help its customers. It is always technical expertise and solutions first and foremost before business. Along the way, Otto had also developed some firm ideas about sustainability. “I always believe that the human race consumes too much of the world’s resources. Everything we consume is related to energy, and this must have an impact on the environment.”

“ATAL Engineering Group and Schneider Electric have built a trusted partnership over decades. Together we shoulder the commitment to deliver innovative solutions in energy management and automation through a people-centric approach, aiming to enable hundreds and thousands more to achieve better quality of life and sustainable living.”
— Rerina OR, President, Schneider Electric (Hong Kong)

“It’s been more of a natural progression than something I planned. It was the market driving me towards that approach.”

Eventually, ATAL Engineering Group expanded to offer all aspects of engineering solutions, becoming a one-stop shop and one of the leading electrical, mechanical, environmental, and IT contractors in Hong Kong. In the past decade, the always evolving ATAL Engineering Group has become known for its innovative approach. It has now built this point of difference into its business plan. A certain per cent of the profits of the company are automatically reinvested in new designs and a small R&D team is dedicated to innovation.

Otto nominates a high-tech automated passenger control system that ATAL Engineering Group has recently developed as an example of its ability to provide innovative engineering solutions. Installed at airports, marine terminals and land-based crossing points, the system makes use of the newest biometrics technology to streamline the immigration process. “It serves the Hong Kong population and any visitors really well,” Otto says. “This is a system we engineered, designed, manufactured and maintained. It is a very innovative product and the largest system of its type in the world.”

Even with its ability to react and respond to a changing market, Otto says there are ongoing challenges. Meeting staffing demands, for instance, is a current obstacle to growth. “Even now, when times are good, we face challenges. We don’t have enough manpower at the construction sites and labour costs keep increasing. We have fixed-cost contracts, so we have to make sure that we have enough people and that we can get the project done with quality, safety, on budget and on time. It’s not easy.”

Otto says an open, cooperative relationship with ATAL Engineering Group’s customers has enabled it to remain productive even in light of such challenges. “Our aim is to always team up with clients to provide the best solutions

to their designs. Because of this approach, they also help us get through any difficulties we face.”

ATAL Engineering Group will retain its commitment to building relationships with its customers as it targets further growth. It recently completed a five-year plan which aims to develop new products and services to new markets. “We’re facing another challenge in that Hong Kong is less than 1,400 square kilometres. It’s a small place and there’s only a limited amount of work in the commercial sector we can do each year. We are already a market leader, so it’s difficult for us to increase our market share,” Otto explains. ATAL needs to expand its business portfolio and look beyond Hong Kong.

ATAL Engineering Group’s precision air-conditioning systems, lifts and escalators business is expanding quickly overseas, Otto says, and may be a key to increasing its international footprint. There are also significant opportunities on the horizon within China, thanks to the One Belt One Road Initiative – a major development strategy aiming to increase cooperation between Asian, Middle East and African countries, and reinvigorate the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road as commercial trading routes.

“China is promoting the initiative to really help the infrastructure of less developed countries,” says Otto. “There will be a lot of investment in terms of power plants, roads, bridges, railways, and water treatment. There is also a new development bank that will help Hong Kong companies offer services to the Belt and Road countries, so that is another opportunity we are looking into.” ■





Successful collaboration with ATAL Engineering Group

The long-term partnership between Schneider Electric and ATAL Engineering Group has produced world-class energy optimisation solutions that continue to evolve and innovate.

In view of the continued growth in both connectivity and energy consumption, innovation and sustainability have become key elements in driving the next generation of energy management and automation across various industries. As a global specialist in these domains, Schneider Electric (Schneider), along with its key partner, ATAL Engineering Group (ATAL), has been successful in driving energy optimisation, increasing efficiency and improving productivity for its customers in Hong Kong for over 20 years.



Success factors in collaborating with ATAL Engineering Group

Individually, Schneider and ATAL are both well-known and strong in their respective fields.

Schneider has thrived as a technology solution provider, delivering a wide range of solutions and products for energy management and automation. EcoStruxure™, developed by Schneider, is an architecture that creates innovation by bringing OT and IT together. It leverages on advancements in the Internet-of-things (IoT), mobility, sensing, cloud, analytics, and cybersecurity technologies to deliver innovative solutions from Connected Products to Edge Control to Applications, Analytics and Services. This platform enables customers to reach new levels of operational efficiency, sustainability, asset performance and people productivity.

ATAL Engineering group is a renowned multi-disciplinary engineering corporation, taking innovation and sustainability as its guiding principles. With its strong 40-year engineering capability and experience, ATAL has evolved into a market leader embracing new challenges on its path and constantly pushing the boundaries to provide more diverse solutions to its customers. ATAL's seasoned management team and its highly qualified staff always strive to exceed customer expectations by delivering engineering excellence, innovative services, as well as efficient and environmentally friendly solutions.

Although different in their distinctive operations, mutual trust and understanding enables seamless and effective collaboration between Schneider and ATAL. Yet, more important than each company's unique expertise is their common vision in energy management, innovation and

maintaining a customer-centric service culture, all of which has helped create and maintain a synergy that has produced numerous successful projects.

Key successful project highlights

Over the past few years, Schneider and ATAL have implemented over 20 projects across various segments such as commercial buildings, water treatment and data centres, including:

1. Taikoo Place Phase 2A tower

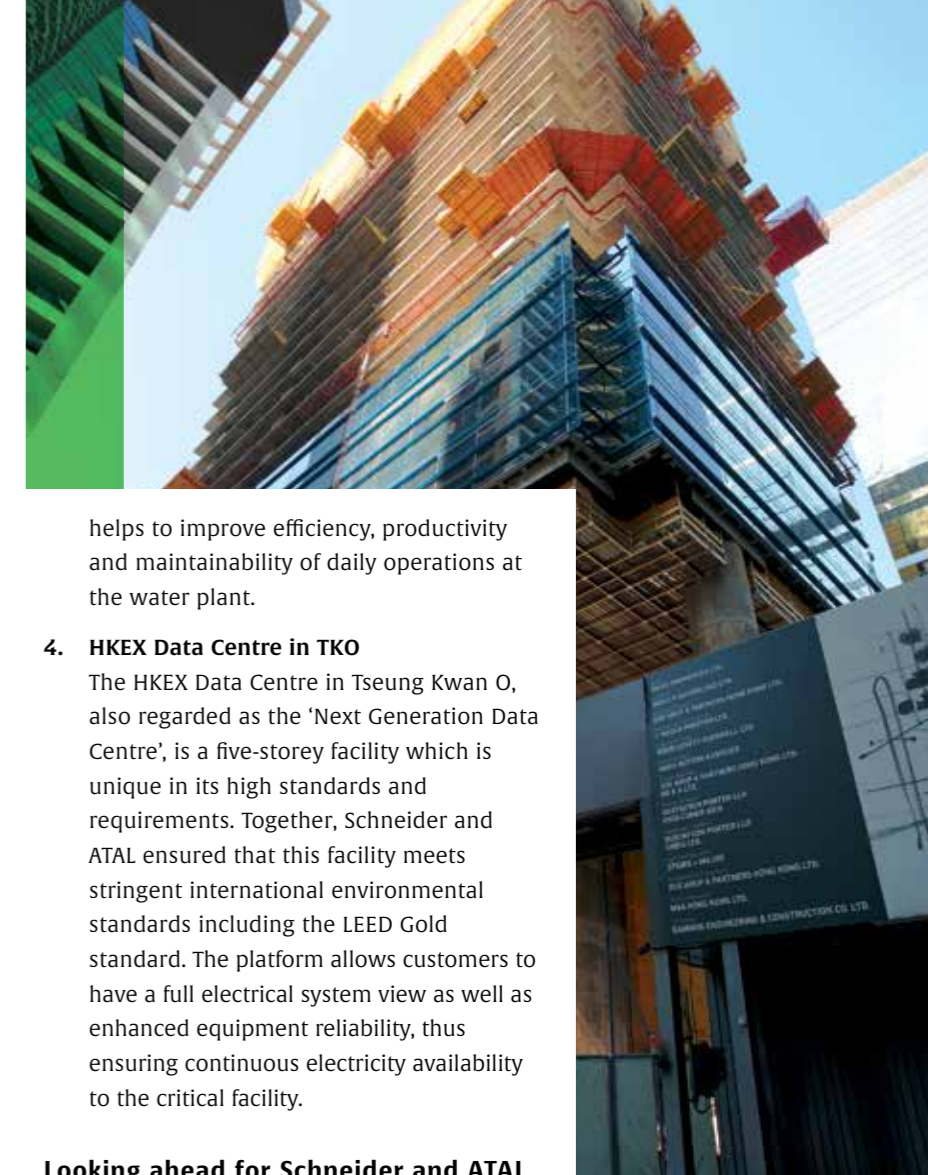
The challenges for this project lay in the need for a highly energy efficient building solution as well as very professional project management. Schneider solutions offered on the project include low-voltage electrical distribution, power quality and energy management system, as well as building management system. Through these, customers have been given a complete set of innovative solutions to help achieve LEED Platinum certification along with more efficient, economical and environmentally friendly operations to support sustainable development.

2. HK Science Park Phase 2&3

The goal of this project was to promote a green and sustainable workplace for tenants. To accomplish this, a cloud-based Energy Management solution was installed to provide tenants with a better understanding of their energy consumption. Public kiosks were also situated in building foyers to allow the public to compare performance levels between buildings. Furthermore, HKSTP's tenants can access specific webpages to measure and monitor how energy is being used in real-time and to check for abnormal patterns in energy consumption and waste.

3. Tai Po Water Treatment Works Expansion

ATAL and Schneider were tasked to upgrade the supervisory control and data acquisition system at Tai Po Water Treatment Plant, enabling its capacity to be increased to double of the current level without interrupting the plant's normal operations. The solutions from Schneider also include a low-voltage electrical distribution system. These provisions allow for a reliable automation system which



helps to improve efficiency, productivity and maintainability of daily operations at the water plant.

4. HKEX Data Centre in TKO

The HKEX Data Centre in Tseung Kwan O, also regarded as the 'Next Generation Data Centre', is a five-storey facility which is unique in its high standards and requirements. Together, Schneider and ATAL ensured that this facility meets stringent international environmental standards including the LEED Gold standard. The platform allows customers to have a full electrical system view as well as enhanced equipment reliability, thus ensuring continuous electricity availability to the critical facility.

Looking ahead for Schneider and ATAL

Schneider and ATAL look forward to continuing their longstanding trusted partnership and to working together to better aid their customers. Moving ahead, in view of the growing trends of digitisation and hyper-connectivity, Schneider and ATAL shoulder the commitment to deliver innovative solutions embedding the latest technology in energy management and automation, aiming to enable hundreds and thousands more to achieve better quality of life and sustainable living.



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