



SHOWTEX MIDDLE EAST

FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS, SHOWTEX MIDDLE EAST HAS BLOSSOMED INTO A LINCHPIN OF THE LIVE EVENTS INDUSTRY OVER THE PAST DECADE. TPMEA'S STEW HUME SAT DOWN WITH MANAGING PARTNER, SVEN PEETERS, TO TALK ABOUT THE COMPANY'S HISTORY AND FUTURE ENDEAVOURS.

The UAE's live industry has evolved dramatically over the last few years but, arguably, the most important – and life-saving – developments we've witnessed are credited to attitudes towards health and safety. One company that has seen these changing attitudes, and indeed been on the frontline of changing preconceptions, is draping, printing and screen specialists ShowTex. The company dates back to 1983, when it began in its home-turf of Belgium, and has since then become a major player in the international live events market. UAE boasts one of ShowTex's flagship branches – and the company celebrated a decade of supplying the region last year. TPMEA checked in with Managing Partner of the ShowTex Middle East department, Sven Peeters, to discuss the innovations and successes of the last 10 years.

There were few better qualified than Peeters to set up the Middle East branch. A veteran of the company, he had already been with ShowTex for 12 years before the Dubai office was anything more than a vision. Peeters started as a

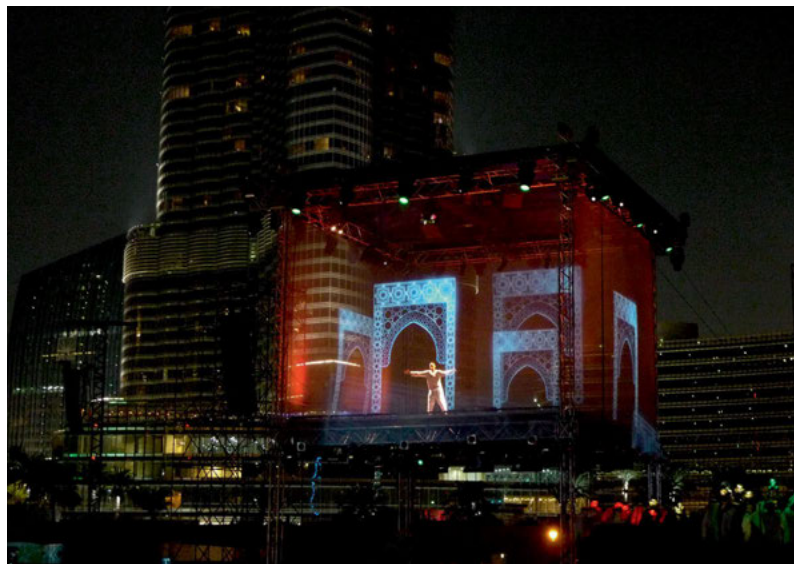
carpenter at one of the European branches and worked his way up the ranks. Meanwhile, the company's name became evermore prominent in the market. Peeters picked up the story: "In the early '00s there was a great deal of buzz surrounding the UAE region. ShowTex had the privilege to work on some prestigious projects in the Middle East even before the entity was established and we had exhibited at the Palme Show in both 2003 and 2004. By the end of the second show we, as a company, realised the only way to effectively service the clients we had out here was to set up a permanent HQ in the region so we could react quickly to the needs of the market. The UAE, and the vision it presented for the future, immediately proved to offer not only the facilities necessary for our industry but also held several potential clients who had already selected UAE as their base of operations."

Grabbing the metaphorical bull by the horns, Peeters, along with his wife and kids, made the move to officially start ShowTex Middle East. However, the first few months were not easy for the company. "We were the very first to

offer professional flame retardant fabrics and projection surfaces in the region; a concept that many event organisers never used to take into consideration," explained Peeters. "It was a challenge in the beginning to create awareness for flame retardant fabrics. Suffice to say there were some pretty dangerous situations and even some tragic accidents over the years. Thank god those days are almost over!"

The first ShowTex Middle East headquarters began life as a small 200sqm warehouse and Peeters was the sole employee. He reminisced over the challenging conditions he faced when he first started: For example, a resourceful Peeters used his car headlights to illuminate the floor while cutting draping due to the intermittent power supply in the facility. "There were some hard times for the first months but I knew the services we were providing would attract the interest – thankfully, I was right."

In setting up a branch in the Middle East, ShowTex hoped to cater its services to jobs of all sizes and build strong bonds with its international client base. Evidently, they



To celebrate ShowTex Middle East's landmark birthday the company organised a gala for the entire team and their families; National day at Burj Khalifa.

succeeded: Some contracts won by ShowTex in the first few months of business have remained as loyal customers through the past decade. "One such job has been the Dubai International Film Festival," remembered Peeters. "This was an incredibly welcome job during the early days of ShowTex Middle East, a job we have continued to work on since 2005. Another job that will always remain top of our memories was the DIFC Celebration when we wrapped two main buildings with a double layer of fabric and a giant kabuki in between two buildings." ShowTex has also become known for its input to the National Day celebrations which saw the company wrap the iconic Burj Al Arab with elastic white StretchTulle for projection mapping. It was certainly a sight to behold.

With more jobs and a fuller schedule year on year, it too came time for ShowTex to scale up. "The rate of growth has been exponential," Peeters enthused. "While we started with a small team, of which most are still with us to this day, our need for professionals in the field of confectioning, fabrication, installations and design has increased as well." The current company headquarters, in the Sharjah Airport Free Zone of the city, now stands as 5,800sqm with over 80 full-time employees. Peeters is adamant, however, that despite rapid growth over the last decade ShowTex Middle East has maintained a family-oriented relationship with its employees. "Team spirit and flexibility are at the core of a successful company and we have therefore chosen to stay away from complicated procedures adopting much more of a flat hierarchy. No individual would be able to deliver the necessary service to a client without having a team of enthusiastic professionals behind him. From a management point of view, this means we have open communication with all our employees. We do have department supervisors

and procedures in place, but we work in an open plan office, which we consider our open source platform. Any question can be answered by whoever is most capable to answer the query, whether this person is considered management or not."

As well as the increased staff base, ShowTex Middle East has also broadened the services it provides. It currently has two textile engineers and several weaving, knitting and finishing machines at its disposal. "This has given us the ability to produce products incredibly quickly and create unique fabrics that didn't exist in our field before now," Peeters proudly pointed out. "We always strive towards client satisfaction and to guarantee our products are being used in the best possible way. Several years ago we also invested in a metal workshop. We now have 3D pipe benders, steel and aluminium cutters, drills and steel and aluminium welding units, as seen on the petals of Mother Of The Nation."

The jewels in the ShowTex crown are two state-of-the-art high frequency PVC welding stations with a combined length of 36m to make practical invisible joints. ShowTex guarantees that it can handle any size curtain or print that customers require. "Within our textiles department one of the highlights is our textile laser cutter with a huge 75sqm vacuum bed, an industry first and able to cut the most challenging designs," asserted Peeters.

In recent news, the company's latest investment has been in its printing department, as Peeters elaborated: "At ShowTex Digital Media we now have a brand new 5m wide UV high resolution printer that can deliver photo realistic quality that is unrivalled."

The company and its staff are visibly proud of the projects and services it now provides, but this pales into comparison when discussing the impact ShowTex has had on the region's attitudes

to health and safety.

ShowTex Middle East's General Manager, Sven De Beul said: "Everything has evolved so much over the last 10 years in the region. Health and safety regulations went from almost non-existent to now, where it is a primary concern for all the jobs we are put on. In our industry, the demand for flame retardant materials is now one of the first things considered by show producers and I have confidence in saying that we are one of the instrumental parties responsible in the changing attitudes within the region."

With over 10 years of hard work behind them, and a glittering future ahead, you can imagine the ShowTex family was ready to celebrate its landmark birthday. "We really wanted to give something back to the ShowTex workers, so we organised a gala for the entire team and their families," smiled Peeters. "We booked a hotel in Fujairah, put up the entire team in hotel rooms and planned a seated dinner followed by a party. It turned out to be a fantastic evening that we will remember forever. However, we will have to make sure we top it with our 20-year celebration!"

After such a successful decade under its belt, you could be forgiven for thinking the company may decide to take the foot of the pedal. You'd be mistaken. In fact, in the words of Peeters, "The best is yet to come." He continued: "With such talented and creative clients around the region, we are sure that the challenges and projects will keep us busy. We may have to adapt but we have been doing so for the last 10 years so we're certainly keen on keeping this ability. Our only request is that customers give us more!"

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*Photos: ShowTex, Ruggieri, JBM and Luca Parisse of Balich Worldwide Shows
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