

Datatrak Systems to go public by years end

Datatrak Systems Ltd, a Maltese company with shareholding by Siemens, Maltacom, and private Maltese investors, plans to go public by the end of this year. It will be incorporating a new holding company, Datatrak Holdings, which will finance the organisation's drive into new markets, and consolidate its position in Malta.

Datatrak Systems began operations in Malta last year, after being licensed by the Wireless & Telegraphy Department in 1998. Its network uses a combination of terrestrial (radio) and satellite (GPS) systems to operate a tracking and location business for vehicles, vessels and fixed assets. In recent months, the company bought into GeoMed Services, a geographical information systems operation with digital mapping and remote sensing as a core business. Its range has since been expanded to include applications like that used by local wardens for ticketing, which was developed from start to finish in Malta, and an inventory information management system used by the Land Registry.

Datatrak has also linked the police mobile squad to its tracking system, and is working with the Water Services Corporation to develop an on-the-spot billing system for metre readers. Alex Falzon, the company's general manager, told The Malta Business Weekly that Malta's small size makes it the ideal model to "showcase" new applications. "It's small, but it's a whole country," he said. "We can do things here that it wouldn't be practical to pilot in other countries. Once these applications are seen in operation here, they can be sold on to much larger territories."

The public share issue is earmarked for financing the company's development drive in Malta, and its penetration of new markets overseas. Siemens Datatrak, the international organisation and a shareholder in the Malta company, have given the go-ahead for Malta to develop markets in the Gulf States, the Middle East and North Africa on an exclusive basis. "The potential is huge," says Mr Falzon. "We're looking forward to it. This is more or less virgin territory where these applications are concerned, and we want to be the first in. Siemens did not make their decision lightly. They saw what we could do here in Malta, and they know that we can handle this business."

A new subsidiary, Datatrak MENA Ltd, is being set up to focus solely on overseas expansion. It will start with Tunisia, Libya, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia. First to be tackled are Saudi Arabia, and Libya, with whom the company has concluded a letter of intent and the submission of a project proposal for the Libyan networks.

Siemens bought Securicor Information Systems, the UK pioneer in cash-in-transit tracking, earlier this year as part of its globalisation drive. The company was then renamed Siemens Datatrak. There are Datatrak networks in the UK, Argentina, South Africa, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Belgium, Austria and Malta.

The Datatrak Holdings share issue will be the first on the alternate listing at the Malta Stock Exchange. "We are selling the future," says Mr Falzon, "and not the past. This is definitely the way ahead for Malta. We have the brains and the skills, and we can do it."

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