

TOWERING PRESENCE



NFT for Tower Cranes is the largest dealer in the world of Manitowoc's Potain brand of tower cranes. Though based in Abu Dhabi, it has a wide regional and even global presence.

CMME SITS DOWN WITH ABU DHABI-BASED NFT FOR TOWER CRANES, THE LARGEST POTAIN DEALER IN THE WORLD, TO GAIN INSIGHTS INTO OPERATIONS, SAFETY AND THE STATE OF THE MARKET

The Middle East is a hotbed of tower crane activity. Skylines are pockmarked with the spindly spires of flat-tops, hammerheads and luffing jib tower cranes, building the next supertall skyscraper. And the byword for tower cranes is NFT. Based in the region but with a footprint that also covers Europe and Asia, NFT is the world's largest dealer of Manitowoc's market-leading Potain tower crane brand.

Nagham Al-Zahlawi, deputy GM of the Abu Dhabi-based tower crane powerhouse, discusses NFT's performance and its commitment to promoting safety and best practices in the sector.

How do you assess the global and regional tower crane market, and how has 2017-19 been for NFT?

The market in our region has seen better days. Since last year, Dubai has been busier for us than the other countries combined, but we are now noting a slowdown in activities. Kuwait is also a good market for us, as we have a handful of mega projects that will continue until next year. After a quiet few years, we are seeing a lot of requests for pricing for big projects being tendered in Saudi Arabia. Hopefully this market will return to its old ways and once again be the biggest in the region.

Fortunately, our branches in Europe and the Far East are busy again, and we have been exporting cranes to new markets such as North and South America, Africa and Western Europe. Abroad, Korea and France are good markets for us. In 2019, we also exported to Egypt, which is one of the brightest spots as market reports estimate that construction in the country could expand by an annual average of 11.3% from 2019 to 2023.

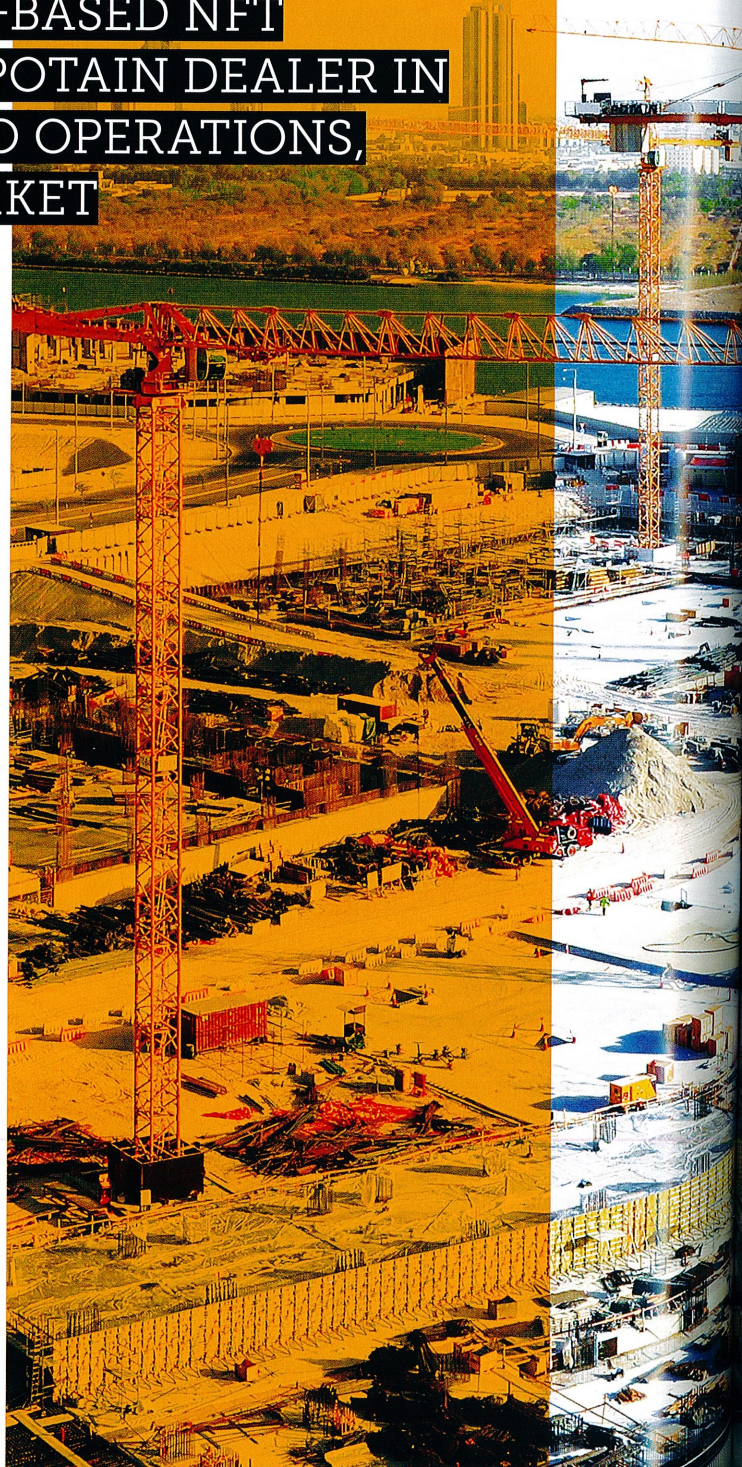
We will continue to support the GCC market and export to any country that has demand. The key is to follow demand wherever it is, and the good thing about a tower crane is that it fits in only a few containers and can be shipped within a week to any destination.

NFT continues to generate a stable profit margin, mainly driven by the UAE and Kuwait in the GCC. Also, a lot of internal changes and process developments have allowed us to cut costs and reduce expenses. In future, we plan to continue developing cooperative strategies that can adapt to any market situation.

For tower cranes, NFT plans to replace most of its luffing cranes in the UK with hydraulic cranes. This will allow NFT's luffer fleet to service more projects in the GCC, where luffing tower cranes are becoming more and more popular. On a strategic level, the goal is to increase our market share worldwide, while maintaining a strong presence in the GCC.

What are the peculiarities and challenges of the GCC tower crane market?

One challenge we face is the competitiveness of the tower crane market. There are almost



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no restrictions in place for entry of new suppliers, as opposed to other countries where strict vetting exists.

The same can be said for the machine itself. Any age and brand of crane can be imported and/or used on most job-sites. The condition and age of the crane is seldom inspected beforehand. Tower cranes are used around the clock in this region, and the weather conditions negatively impact the crane, whether in use or on the ground being stored. While there is a safety culture on most job-sites, it often neglects the tower crane. We see a lot of installations that are ill-advised.

On a macro-economic level, political tensions and cash flow problems remain the biggest worries for suppliers at the end of the supply chain.

What advantages does Potain offer, and why is the brand popular in the region?

Potain have been manufacturing tower cranes for 90 years, so they are ahead of most manufacturers when it comes to innovation. New products are released on a regular basis and have customer requirements in mind. At every exhibition of the construction machinery industry, no matter the continent, you can see a Potain stand with new products.

They are a global manufacturer with factories all over the world. Therefore, they have policies in place for every segment of their business. The diversity of their facilities means they have different product offerings for specific market needs. The Potain name is historically known to contractors as a guarantee of safety and quality. Most of our customers rate us high on variety, availability of spare parts, endurance, safety, reliability and quality.

Potain has a dealer network that we believe is second to none in this industry, and the manufacturer regularly organises trainings and dealer events to connect and educate those representing the product. As part of this dealer network, we can find used cranes and spare parts almost anywhere.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of hammerhead, flat-top and luffing cranes? How is each type perceived and used in the GCC?

Luffing jib tower cranes are ideal for congested job-sites or obstructed areas with limited space. They are also the perfect solution when it is forbidden for part of the crane to over sail outside the project boundary. The disadvantage is commercial, as they're the most expensive of the three types. Most high-rise buildings feature several luffing cranes to speed up progress. The ability to limit the radius of the crane

REASONS FOR RISE

FACTORS BEHIND NFT'S SUCCESS

According to Nagham Al-Zahlawi, certain factors make NFT unique and are the source of the company's strength.

- **Size:** NFT can supply any quantity of cranes, in any size and configuration, anywhere in the world.
- **Stock:** NFT has more than 2,000 new and used tower cranes in stock, with different models in all sizes to match any delivery requirement.
- **Experience:** Having started 35 years ago, NFT has some of the most knowledgeable people in the industry, with know-how for problem-

solving and special customer demands.

- **After-sale support:** The NFT Call Centre is available 24/7 and the company can provide technical and on-site support to ensure minimum downtime.
- **Design team:** NFT has an in-house design team to provide tailor-made solutions that take space, capacity and cost constraints into account.
- **Reputation:** NFT and Potain are synonymous in the region, and NFT has worked hard to build its brand. NFT makes sure it is

well stocked with spare parts to reduce customer downtime. Its technicians are regularly trained by the manufacturer in the latest developments.

- **Potain's support:** NFT has full support from Potain, a brand it has been representing since 1994. Potain's engineering department is regularly kept busy with special requests from NFT clients, such as abnormal freestanding heights and other site configurations. Their joint speed of response helps NFT solve critical issues.



prevents any possible collision, as most high-rise buildings have a slender layout.

The topless crane has gained a lot of popularity in the last decade. Unlike hammerhead cranes, topless cranes do not require a cathead, which means fewer masts are required. The redundancy of the cathead means it is faster to erect and requires fewer containers during transport. The only disadvantage compared to a hammerhead is that capacity at the end of the jib is usually lower.



NFT has moved into its new premises in Abu Dhabi's Al Dafra area, where it keeps enormous stocks of cranes, crane sections and spare parts, all supported by its technicians for quick delivery.

The hammerhead is the more traditional crane. Its disadvantage is the cathead, which can be a problem when working in a job-site with a restriction on the maximum height, such as near an airport. Aldar's Water's Edge project in Abu Dhabi, for example, is on the flight path to Abu Dhabi Airport and therefore cranes were required to be topless.

Another new type of tower crane has emerged: the hydraulic crane, the first in the European range to combine luffing jib and topless capabilities. It uses hydraulic

power for the luffing movement for greater efficiency.

How are the rental sector and used market doing in the GCC?

At NFT, 80% of our revenue is from the rental segment. Clients choose to rent instead of purchase for many reasons; capital investments for new cranes are too big to bear for many projects, and most companies have tunnel vision and make decisions on a project-to-project basis, as the future is uncertain.

Another reason for renting is that companies don't see a long-term need for a model that is unique to a specific job-site. This is usually the case for the larger tower cranes. Also, a job-site may require several cranes, and purchasing too many may be illogical for the long term if jobs aren't guaranteed. The cost of owning cranes includes operators, technicians, regular training, insurance, spare parts and other related hassles and expenses. Most of these are usually included when renting.

The used market is in a good place right now, as Europe was facing a small shortage because of all the cranes it sold during the crisis years. This is visible through the trading websites that bring together supply and demand for second-hand machinery. In the GCC, used cranes are very popular. However, we recommend procuring a used crane only from a reputable manufacturer or supplier because of the required level of refurbishment, quality of the structure and parts availability.

It is also always important to remember that the manufacturer will offer OEM services



or their partners and ask for spare parts and services as necessary. At NFT, we refurbish all our used tower cranes to the same standard as any European manufacturer. We have facilities in our yard in Al Dafra dedicated for reconditioning used tower cranes. Similarly, Manitowoc has had a dedicated rebuild, repair, remanufacture and exchange programme for all models of Manitowoc, Grove and Potain cranes since 2011.

How is safety treated in the region, and what does NFT do to improve safety for its clients?

In the Middle East, safety is often treated as a luxury that cannot be afforded. It is sad to see many sites using cranes from the 1980s or '90s. Perhaps market conditions oblige them to cut corners when it comes to the right practices. A tower crane occupies a large footprint, so an accident is highly fatal. There should never be a compromise on safety or quality when it comes to tower cranes.

NFT always emphasises the importance of safety when procuring tower cranes, whether during negotiations with the procurement team, at conferences, or even on-site with our technician – safety is our number one priority. At a regional machinery exhibition last year, NFT and Manitowoc gave a joint presentation on the dangers of compromising on quality for price. We discussed the serious concern over the rise in counterfeit parts, and the do's and don'ts on job-sites in terms of safety. In 2017, NFT and Manitowoc launched the Safety First Campaign, where we went to our clients' sites trying to spread awareness around safety for tower cranes.

NFT says 80% of its revenues come from the rental sector, owing to customers unwilling to make a big capital investment in a new crane when the project pipeline is uncertain.

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NFT has also assisted the Abu Dhabi Municipality in preparing regulations for the safe operation of heavy equipment, and received an award for our participation and contribution. Any chance we get to raise awareness or support creating regulations to improve safety of people and equipment, we will take it.

Discuss the new introduction at Bauma this year, and the prospects of those models in this region.

New introductions in Bauma feature the Potain MCH125, a hydraulic luffing crane with maximum capacity of 8t, a 50m jib length with a tip load of 2t, a very short counter jib at 7m, and a small out-of-service radius of 13.5m. It is designed for easy erection and dismantling, and is erected faster as there is no need for rope reeving to allow the luffing movement. It is done by means of a hydraulic jack.

Another Bauma highlight was the Potain MDT809, the biggest topless crane in Potain's fleet. Available in three configurations with maximum capacities of 25t, 32t or 40t, it also features Potain's latest CCS technology, introduced a few years ago. This new generation features the highest safety standards in the industry, greater lift performance with Potain Plus, fast and easy set-up, and optimised ergonomic control.

The new HUPM crane is also a welcome addition to an already very strong offering of self-erecting cranes, ideal for low-rise construction with quick set-up, high performance and low operating costs. ●



WINNING POINTS WHY CHOOSE POTAIN?

It's no secret that Potain is among the most popular tower crane brands in the world, and a favourite in the GCC. While its partnership with NFT is the icing on the cake for customers in the region, Nagham Al-Zahlawi points out why the Manitowoc-owned French brand has attained great heights.

- **Innovation:** Potain innovations include the Vision Cab, the Dialog control system and the LLC range of hoists.
- **Endurance:** Potain cranes are especially adapted to perform strenuous work expeditiously. They offer frequency control systems for all modern and

advanced operations, quick assembly and dismantling, and full rotation system control, and occupy minimal space for storage and transportation.

- **Quality:** With two testing centres in Lusigny and Charlieu in France, Potain tower cranes undergo strenuous testing. It takes years for Potain to release new products because of the amount of time it takes to test them.
- **High resale value:** A Potain crane is an investment because of its guaranteed resale value. The brand name is recognised by customers

worldwide. In addition, Potain guarantees the availability of parts for all cranes, even those that are more than 20 years old. The well-established Potain used crane market gives the highest residual value for the brand.

- **Adaptability:** Potain has products and solutions for building tall with several cranes on-site, with fast and easy installation in dense urban areas for building narrow towers while saving on ties, and for industrial construction – in fact, for any type of work with tower cranes.