

One-to-one

with **Philippe Somers**
CEO, ACE 54



Through an expanded geographical footprint in 54 African countries, ACE 54 offers shippers and consignees more options and a competitive edge. ACE 54 provides technical information and best pricing for project destination services in the oil and gas, renewables, mining, nuclear, hydro power, rail and infrastructure sectors.

Q Tell me a bit about a day in the life as CEO of ACE 54?

A As you can imagine the CEO's day – like any other CEO around the world – has changed since the arrival of COVID-19.

In the past 14 years, I have been the SVP of a multinational freight forwarder in industrial projects (IP) with 800+ employees under my leadership. Apart from my IP responsibilities, I was also a board member of the group's freight forwarding line of business with almost 10,000 staff and €3.2bn turnover.

In September 2019 I decided to transform from corporate to entrepreneur, which was a life time ambition. The formation of ACE 54 Project Management was completed in Dubai in early November. This unique concept allow us to use our global network for industrial projects to and in Africa. Most importantly, for the first time, all project freight forwarders will be able to develop business in an emerging market of 54 countries without major investments in overseas infrastructure or resources.

Since our activity is specific to one continent and with the COVID-19 impact, our travel has been drastically reduced. We continuously have the desire to improve the quality of our pricing activity as well as our African network becoming the best in class.

We constantly communicate and exchange with our African network and strategic partners across the globe. We strive to improve our partnerships in the 54 African countries to ensure the pricing and implementation process is exceeding our customer's expectations. This has become part of our daily routine.

Q How does ACE 54 help companies develop business in Africa?

A ACE 54's concept is to act as the international project forwarder's (IPF) internal pricing desk during their IPF tender stage. We cover the process from RFI to award and implementation.

ACE 54 provides strategic advise on request for registration of operational offices and legal identities. ACE 54 also provides external corporate governance and compliance packages and aligns with strategic partners.

Through the different organisations, we have an exceptional knowledge of the African project market in all six segments: oil and gas, mining, power (nuclear and hydro), renewables (solar and wind), infrastructure and T&D/ electricity. In this way, ACE 54 creates a pipeline and also updates and administrates on behalf of the IPF.

Q You recently opened an office in Belgium, why was this location chosen and what future locations are being considered?

A Our forecast was to be more flexible, available and if needed able to travel by car throughout Europe to meet clients. 70% of our clients are based in Europe.

Our European head office is based in Antwerp, Belgium, my home city, the gateway to Africa and the number one breakbulk and project port in Europe.

We remain active in Dubai and continue to grow our Middle East clients from IPF's to asset owners including fabricators.

We hope to expand next in Houston, covering the US and Canada, and Hong Kong covering Japan, South Korea and China, reaching the four (project) corners of the world.

Q What does the future hold for ACE 54?

A ACE 54 has put itself in a position where it can set up and offer strategic alliances between IPF, carrier at the origin and ACE 54 supported by destination agents and heavy lift companies in Africa for larger size projects.

ACE 54 furthermore assists IPF and contractors to export their expertise and success stories of their core business to the African continent with limited financial investments.