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to rehabilitate and modernize the country's ten regional airports, including extending the runways and upgrading safety facilities (air traffic control, radar, baggage control) at Port-Gentil and Franceville, the two main airports in this country of 1.2 million.

Tecsum International

The contract also calls for plans to construct new runways and passenger areas, with the emphasis on capacity and quality. This is a major contract, with the fees representing at the very least 10% of the company's international sales figure. The overall contract, financed entirely by the Gabonese ministry with assistance from the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) (www.arabfund.org), represents a total of 60 person-years.

As the oil goes...

"Doing business in Gabon is no piece of cake," the President concedes, "but it's no more difficult than in Cameroon or the Congo — quite the contrary. Oil prices are strong and the Gabonese economy is in good shape. If I were to give one word of advice, I would say establish a presence on the Gabonese market, not necessarily by actually being there, but by way of the institutions, the banks and the other networks. One must also take advantage of the fact that the Gabonese are well aware of Canada's reputation in technology and of the fact that we have French as a common language."

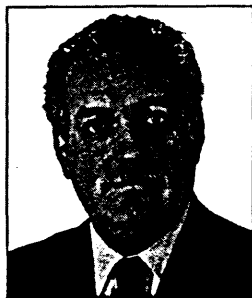
This company president, no stranger to African ways, notes that customer loyalty among Africans is remarkable. The company's sales expansion strategy is gradually evolving from West Africa (the main market) to Mediterranean Africa. In all, 70% of its International activities take place in

Africa. Its African operations generate an income of nearly \$30 million.

7th heaven in sight

The fees could double if the firm obtains the works supervision contract, which will be executed on the various sites in parallel with the first contract.

While acknowledging that the international competition is strong in this market rich in oil, forestry and mineral resources, Parent feels that it would be very difficult to replace Tecsum in the execution of this second



Marc Parent, President of the Montreal consulting engineering firm Tecsum International

contract. "Our chances are excellent," he explains, "because we have followed every development from the start and have forged close ties with all the stakeholders."

The company recently produced a comprehensive, intermodal plan (air, land and sea) for transportation in Gabon, funded by the

World Bank (www.worldbank.org) (\$800,000), and a preliminary study to rehabilitate the ten regional airports, funded by CIDA (www.acdicida.gc.ca) (\$450,000): "This enables us to get to know our customers and to adapt better to their needs," Mr. Parent went on to say.

The value of networks

Like its British and French competitors, Tecsum linked up with an expert in airport operations management, Aéroports de Montréal International (ADMI, an affiliate which is no longer in existence). But there is more than this to the network.

"The personnel at the Canadian Embassy (www.infoexport.gc.ca/ga) have kept track of every stage involved in the file and have lent their support in dealings both with the Gabonese ministries concerned and with the

funders," said Parent. "I should add that we have also had excellent relations with the ambassadors with whom we have been in contact over the years. CIDA has also provided us with funding through its industrial co-operation programs.

"Because the embassy in Libreville is small, the staff members often wear two hats: one for international cooperation (CIDA), and one for international trade. This allows us to examine and discuss files from all angles.

"There is strength in unity, and the networks are invaluable: Tecsum has been invited directly by the Gabonese ministry to answer the call for tenders.

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