

Bright Ideas

With German engineering, years of experience, and the smartest minds in the world on its team, ET Solutions is the shining light of the solar industry.

Images courtesy of ET Solutions

Although solar technologies to harness energy from the sun to generate power were first developed in the 1860s, it wasn't until more than 100 years later in the 1980s that commercial solar power started to emerge. As more concerns were raised about the impact of generating electricity from coal, and more consumers wanted energy that didn't have an environmental impact, the industry grew.

In 2005, ET Solar was formed in China with the goal of providing smart solar energy to consumers. In 2008, the company formed a subsidiary based in Germany called ET Solutions AG, which aims to be the top choice as a solar energy turnkey solutions provider in Europe. CEO Linhui Sui of ET Solutions joined ET Solar in 2007, heading up the US branch of the company before coming to ET Solutions in 2010.

Linhui had an impressive background before moving to ET Solutions. He obtained a PhD in

physics before working for NASA for seven years as a solar physicist, doing research for the organisation. "I had been researching the Sun with NASA when an opportunity arose because I knew the founder of ET Solar. For me, I understand how electricity is generated but I also understand the physics side. It was an opportunity for me to transfer myself from being a pure physicist into the solar business. That's how I came from the research institute to entering the industry."

The opportunity also gave Linhui a chance to learn about management along the way. Coming from an academic and research background, he didn't have a lot of experience in corporate management. "I was a physicist, which is totally different from what I'm doing right now. Really, from the beginning, I taught myself how to become a manager and CEO. I think I'm now very comfortable with this kind of management."

Since it was established, ET Solutions has progressed in

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- Linhui Sui

Europe quickly. Linhui says he is happy with the growth and the markets the company was able to establish itself in. "We have been growing continuously since 2008. In 2009, we only did one project in Germany and now we have done more than 500MWp of solar power plants around the world; we only had around 10 employees and now we have about 70.

"We're in quite a few countries in Europe and the Mid-East; we're in Germany, Romania, Italy, Ukraine, Israel, UK, and Jordan. Our business has been growing dramatically not only in manpower, but also in countries and project size. The first project we did in Germany was 1.8 megawatts and now the largest project we are building is 50-plus megawatts. We're growing with industry."

However, starting a subsidiary company in Europe just after the global financial crisis was not easy. "In 2008, when we established ourselves, we had to first get the recognition as bankable in the eyes of institutional investors in Germany and the banks which >



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provide non-recourse loans to the projects.”

What helped ET Solutions in the initial stages, according to Linhui, was having a large and successful parent company that was able to support the company. “If a parent company can guarantee the performance of the subsidiary, it will make it much easier for us to get approved by investors and the banks. So that’s very important. And today, we are still benefiting from accepting the guarantee from the parent company in China.”

Having the financial backing of a larger company was also helpful for Linhui and ET Solutions in other ways. “Another thing is that with a bigger parent company we can be more flexible in business development and we even can be more aggressive when needed. For example, when we first entered in the UK market in 2013, in order to quickly establish ourselves as an experienced EPC [project engineering, procurement, and construction] service provider we had to use our own money to buy the project right, and then finance the whole project construction before selling to local investors in the UK.”

Having the backing of ET Solar was also helpful in an industry that is so new and where change is the norm. “The market has changed so quickly year to year. When we entered into the business, Germany was the only country where we could run and it was the largest market in the world. Now Germany is far less important than it once was. So we went to Italy, then we went to Romania. Change is a constant thing in solar and this brings a lot of challenges for a company like us.”

One of the main challenges was that ET Solutions’ main business was in EPC, which requires a very hands-on approach. “Typically, EPC needs a lot of local management. With business development, you need to work with local developers, and with construction work management, you need to have

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local construction managers and even qualified health and safety managers.”

ET Solutions is doing well in Europe and the company is expanding successfully in emerging markets like South America, Africa, and Asia. “We’re also expanding to Latin America right now, to Brazil and Chile, and markets where solar is just starting. These are all supported and operating from ET Solutions in Germany. We want to continue to bring our experience and our large project and construction track record to other emerging markets such as Turkey.

“To do that, we really need our suppliers to have high quality and be cost effective. Right now we are talking about a lot of projects in Africa and Latin America. And those markets don’t have existing suppliers for large-scale solar equipment, so we had to bring the suppliers from Europe and the US to those new markets. For example, we are doing a project in Chile and a lot of the suppliers we brought to Chile were from Europe because they also wanted to be in those emerging markets with us. We helped them grow while they were helping us to land in those new markets with high-quality products and services.”

Although Linhui believes that ET Solutions will continue to grow and be successful, both in Europe

and new markets, there are challenges with solar, particularly the higher price compared with other traditional forms of energy. “Solar is growing very quickly. But we need to continue to bring down the cost of solar, because compared with coal and hydro power, solar is still relatively more expensive. We need to use our engineering creatively, streamline project management, and speed up installation. We need to reduce the dollar-per-kilowatt hour for solar and make solar more competitive.”

The past 10 years with ET Solar and ET Solutions have been extremely rewarding for Linhui. “The industry gave me the opportunity to learn. The industry also changed so quickly. From continent to continent, the politics are so different—there aren’t really any rules to follow. It gave me the chance to grow and for our company to grow on different continents and in different countries. It’s still growing.”

For the future, Linhui and ET Solutions are looking to more emerging markets, to grow the business and help create more sustainable energy. “Solar is a necessity because you need power; it’s not a luxury. Our company will continue to provide our global customers with industry-leading solar products and EPC services. But even more important, we want to be more of an energy solutions provider, not just a construction company.” •

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In the context of a society based on consumption, long-term clean energy and risk reducing of energy price volatility with reliable PV solutions should not be an option but a constant concern. This purpose became the main focus for Renergy Power Plants Group, a leading player in the photovoltaic market with an extensive experience in offering complete services to assist customers in all stages of the “going solar” process. Founded in 2011 in Germany, the company is now comprised of Renergy Power Plants SRL (Romania), Renergy Power Plant GmbH (Germany), Renergy Power plants de Chile SPA (Chile), Renew-co Ltd (UK), Renergy Engineering (UAE).

Currently present in Europe, Latin America and Middle East, Renergy Power Plants manages to be as close as possible to its customers needs offering the best tailor-made solutions.

Renergy Power Plants can support all the projects through all stages from conception to construction on the strength of the long standing experience in utility scale solar power plants, a huge engineering track record and a systematic approach to develop comprehensive engineering solutions for its clients. Moreover, providing premier design, engineering and professional services for the solar industry with a specialisation in large and utility-scale photovoltaic solar plants with wide range of expertise in the industry, the company sets easily apart from the competition.

Renergy Power Plants has seven years and 200 MW combined experience in the solar industry worldwide in a wide range of services:

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- Technical advisory in international tenders
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- Construction
- HV-MV-AC-DC optimisation
- Grid impact study
- Substation design
- Grid connection facilities design
- H&S management
- Commissioning and start-up
- Project management
- Technical due diligence services

