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AUTUMN 2019



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GROUNDFORCE

# Diligent planning the key to success

Groundforce has had a demanding year as airline closures, growing air traffic and ATC strikes have impacted business

Portuguese ground handler Groundforce has been planning diligently to overcome the industry's peaks and troughs.

The Lisbon-headquartered handler was affected earlier this year by the closure of one of its clients, when Germania went bankrupt in February, and has also felt the impact of growing air traffic and ATC strikes.

Catarina Gomes Mota, Commercial Director, Groundforce (pictured above), said the main operational challenges will continue to be centred in the same three main pillars: safety, punctuality and service excellence.

In her view, the best way to handle them is changing due to a disruptive technology environment, higher traffic congestion and more 'tailor-made' standards demanded by the carriers.

However, opportunities are there for the taking.

"One important opportunity will be the ability to develop and implement changes in operational and support processes to keep pace with technological progress.

"Particularly at Groundforce Portugal, our CEO, Paulo Leite, has been driving the entire organisation to actively incorporate in its activity a transformational environment, improving the efficiency of the operations," Mota said.

She also said it will be very important to identify and explore synergies across the different areas of organisation to improve operating margins, while another opportunity will be to leverage existing knowledge in other value-added business to customers.

Trends are always changing and Mota sees the main one being the implementation of new technologies such as the self-baggage drop-off counters and development of artificial intelligence solutions. Another trend will be the challenge of adding

value at the different touchpoints of the customer journey by putting the customer at the centre. "For instance, improving the inflight experience or the development of new functionalities within the carrier application/ website to engage customers," she said.

The third major trend, Mota believes, will be an increased focus on the adoption of eco-friendly practices across the value chain by ground handlers, carriers, airport infrastructure, IT and GSE providers.

Groundforce, like much of the handling market, feels the pressure from tight margins and the handler's position in the middle of the value chain – being the meat in the sandwich, as it were.

Mota said that on one hand, GHs face demands from carriers to meet SLAs, which are becoming more exacting and specific to each operation, while on the other hand, GHs' activity is influenced by the operating and financial model established by the airport infrastructure.

So what does Groundforce do to overcome the pressures?

"First, it is crucial to establish sustainable and long-term partnerships with carriers, where there is a clear understanding of each side's obligations and goals," she said. "Also, GHs should establish continuous improvement practices to guarantee that new procedures are tested and implemented to foster greater efficiency.

"Finally, it is important to have control mechanisms to guarantee that all services delivered are being fully charged to the carriers, not allowing any revenue loss," Mota added.

Air traffic control strikes are also unwanted, Mota said, as these irregularities create substantial costs for all the players in the market but particularly for GHs like Groundforce.

"It is always more expensive to handle an operation in which the flights are considerably deviated from their estimated time (and even worse, without any pattern) and also when we have staff planned according to each carrier's operation and specifications," she concluded.