Cleaning Up with Trash

How Anaergia's CFO, Hani Kaissi, is using his engineering background to integrate finance into the renewable-energy and waste-reduction business

BY JULIE EDWARDS

Armed with a bachelor of engineering degree from the American University of Beirut and an MBA from McGill University, **Hani Kaissi** is one of a very few CFOs with a background not in accounting and finance. Kaissi began his career building large desalination plants before he began focusing on water treatment and wastewater recycling at Zenon and GE Water, eventually becoming Anaergia's first Canadian employee. Here, Kaissi outlines the numbers powering the energy company's success. ➜

Hani Kaissi has been involved in the clean tech industry since the early days of his career, and that passion is evident in one of his favourite quotes from French playwright Molière: "It is not only what we do, but also what we do not do, for which we are accountable."

2 birds with 1 stone

The impact of fossil fuels on the environment—as well as their finite quantity—is a significant issue facing the world today. Mainly, it's the problem of waste. "We live in a world where almost all the materials we use eventually wind up in a landfill—where wastewater treatments transfer pollutants from the water to be landfilled, and where animal waste and chemical fertilizers cause significant pollution of land and water," says Hani Kaissi, CFO of clean-energy company Anaergia. "You can't help but be interested in a single solution that addresses both problems: the extraction of resources from waste and creating renewable energy from it."

35% growth

It was just seven years ago that Dr. Andrew Benedek, international authority on water- and wastewater-treatment technology, started Anaergia. The company is now a global leader in the production of clean energy, fertilizer, and recycled water from organic waste streams. The company services customers in the municipal, industrial, commercial, and agricultural sectors.

Today, more than 1,600 plants worldwide use Anaergia technology. "They say one person's trash is another person's treasure; at Anaergia, we take that concept to extremes," Kaissi says. "We turn sewage and landfill waste into energy." Despite its relative youth, the company has been successful, with a compounded annual growth rate forecasted at approximately 35 percent between 2008 and 2015. That healthy growth rate is expected to continue until at least 2017.

15 locations

A truly global Canadian company, Anaergia has 15 locations across North America, Europe, and Asia, including 3 manufacturing facilities. "When you look at the landscape of Canadian companies—as they grow and develop internationally—they usually end up being acquired by multinationals," Kaissi says. "From the finance perspective, they end up just reporting on the

Canadian operation to the global head office. The problem is that if we, as a global, Canadian company, need finance and accounting professionals with experience consolidating international subsidiaries, we have difficulty finding that expertise in Canada. We've had to invest significantly in training."

1 important difference

In addition to his extensive engineering and project-management experience, Hani Kaissi has had the opportunity to work in a variety of functions, and his current responsibilities include accounting, finance, mergers and acquisitions, project controls, and administrative tasks such as HR, IT, and contracts. "My engineering background has helped me achieve what many CFOs just aspire to—truly integrating finance with the operation of the business and its strategy," he says. "Finance is a driving function, not just a reporting function. Finance works with operations to translate business goals into operational goals so that every part of the business—every function, every region, every project—is clear on its own targets and objectives. When you aggregate all these pieces and targets, you end up achieving the business goals."

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1 large database

Anaergia is in the process of implementing an ERP tool that spans the business. "It typically starts with monitoring projects in the sales pipeline, then moves to project execution—engineering, procurement, manufacturing, production, and delivery—then to plant operations," Kaissi says. "The ERP integrates all of these activities with one another—and with the financials of the business. If you're forecasting or doing financial reporting, you have a real-time view of what's going on with the business because all the data is in one single, underlying database; it's all live, and it's all moving from one function to the other as the project progresses."

4 big projects

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago selected Anaergia for a new organic waste receiving and processing facility to help convert one of North America's largest wastewater-reclamation facilities into a resource-recovery and energy-generation centre. This project will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by the equivalent of 99,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide.

Elsewhere, Anaergia's Dagenham facility in the greater London, United Kingdom, area has fed 30,000 tons of food waste from commercial and residential sources per year. This waste is converted into 1.6 megawatts of renewable electricity and thermal energy for a local business park.

Meanwhile, its Szarvas facility, in Hungary, is the largest and most advanced organic-waste-to-renewable-energy system in Eastern Europe. It converts 120,000 tons of local commercial, industrial, and agricultural waste streams a year into 4.2 megawatts of renewable electricity, 4.1 megawatts of renewable heat, renewable gas, and clean water, and 90,800 tons of natural fertilizer.

Finally, a facility under execution in Cyprus will be an integrated installation for the management of 182,000 tons of mixed municipal solid waste a year from the Limassol region. The facility will reduce waste volume by 90 percent and produce recyclables, compost, two megawatts of renewable electricity, and secondary fuel for the local cement kiln.