Simon Doran is Managing Director at GAC EnvironHull, a part of the GAC Group, a global provider of integrated shipping, logistics and marine services. Simon heads up the sub-sea division responsible for delivering a cutting-edge service by way of a safe, cost-effective and environmentally friendly solution to counter one of the industries’ oldest problems - keeping vessels clean!

Please talk to us about your main responsibilities as MD at GAC EnvironHull:

To successfully roll out our safe, eco-friendly, cutting-edge hull cleaning solution, HullWiper, to the global shipping industry. It’s the next generation in hull cleaning technology, a Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) which lets ship owners and operators clean their vessels without abrasives or divers using brushes, so it eliminates the risk to human life and damage to costly hull coatings. The cleaning process does not compromise the marine environment and can be carried out at locations where traditional cleaning is prohibited.

What techniques are used to ensure cleaning is eco-friendly?

HullWiper collects marine fouling removed from hulls, rather than releasing it into the sea which could pollute local waters and spread harmful species. Captured fouling and residues are pumped into a unit on the ROV that filters all of the marine growth removed from the vessel for safe, ecologically-approved disposal on land.

The shipping community continues to be surprised by how little fouling is left once filtered, compressed and all sea water is removed. We need to continue educating people, who are not marine biologists, about the ac-tual mechanism at work that allows us to do what we do.

What did it mean for HullWiper to win “Product of the Year” in the Environmental Leader Product and Project Awards 2017?

Over the past few years we have received a number of industry awards, including the Product of the Year title. It is always an honour to receive such acknowledgement from the shipping community, and I see it as a reflection that what we are doing is being noticed and that we are heading in the right direction. Recognition of our service, our product and our team in general makes it all worthwhile.

Please describe the importance of R&D:

After our customers, R&D is everything. We are continually looking at ways to improve, to become more efficient and how we can reduce costs to our principals. Without R&D things do not change, and change is essential in our industry. It improves efficiency and literally saves lives as well as plays a key role in protecting our ‘delicate’ ecosystems.

What are your main market segments?

Presently our main markets are LNGs and any type of vessel calling at locations where traditional hull cleaning is prohibited. We appeal to all market segments but vessels that have the latest silicon coating benefit the most as our cleaning method is less aggressive than brushes, so coatings last longer.

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What are the challenges ahead?

Our service is always compared to traditional methods of hull cleaning. It is like comparing apples to oranges – they are both fruit but they are fundamentally different. The biggest challenge we face is changing the industry’s perception and encouraging a “bigger, longer-term picture” perspective which looks beyond the dollar number on the quotation. There is so much more than just a number in what we do and value we deliver.

Please tell us about your memorable shipping experience and favourite ship:

As an ex RN Diver, I have many memorable experiences, from happy to sad to extraordinary. But my favourite ship is easy - the QE2. I did my first ‘commercial’ diving job on her in Southampton over 20 years ago. I have been in Dubai nearly 19 years and I see her here almost every day, a now sad and lonely sight since she was retired in 2008 and now sits laid alongside in Port Rashid, but nonetheless a very memorable ship.

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