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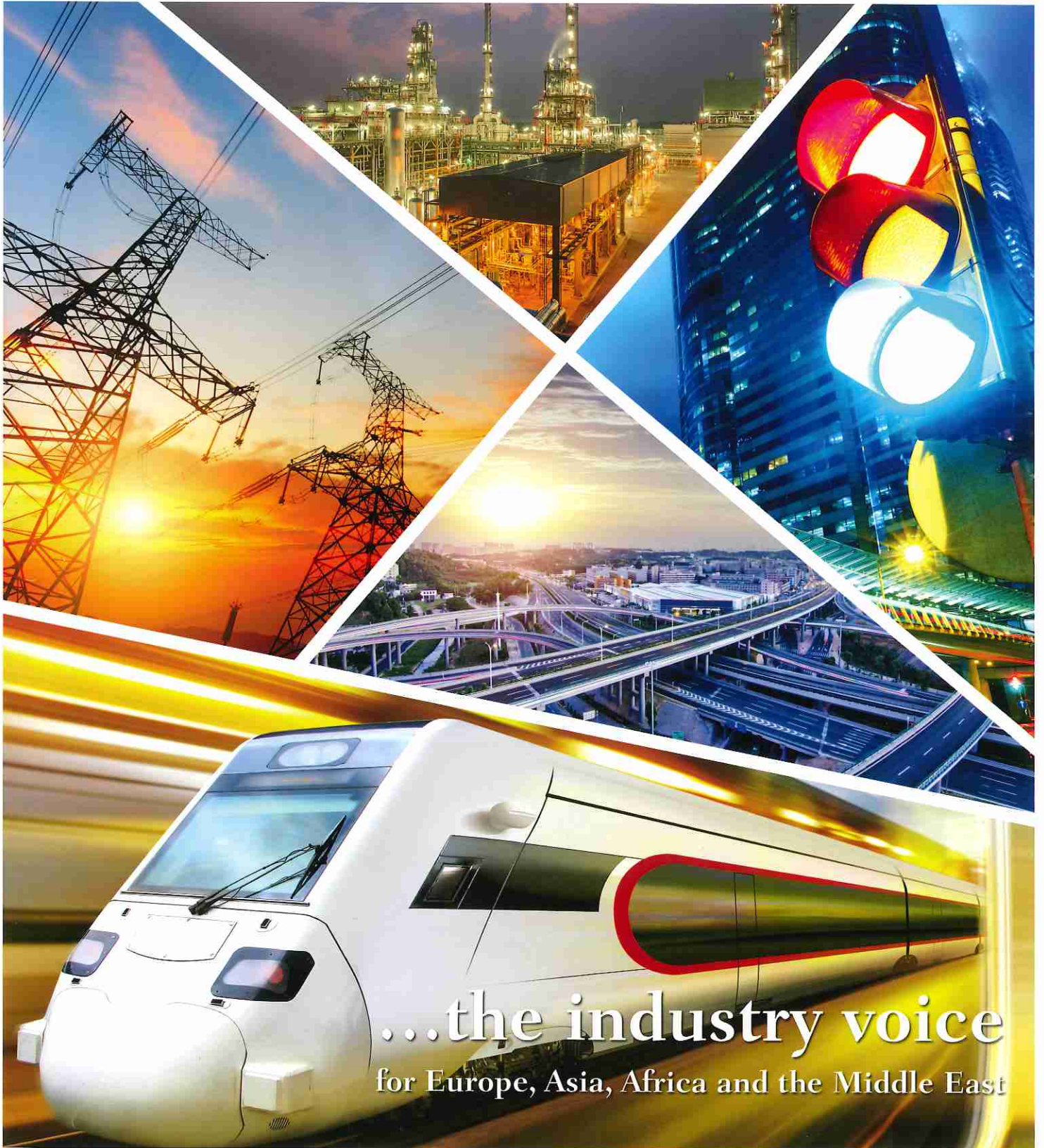
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with a dedicated area for the collection and storage of materials for recycling, as well as good links to public transportation. Together with an on-site 660 kW solar power plant – one feature that arguably makes this stand out from a regular office building – these measures help the DEWA building reduce consumption of energy by 66 per cent and water by 48 per cent. In addition, 36 per cent of material used in the construction comes from recycled content. “While it just looks like a regular office building, what it has achieved is phenomenal,” remarks Mario. “It is a clear of example of how we should be creating buildings.”

Lean and green

While such developments sound impressive, there has long been a stigma attached to the green building sector in terms of the perceived additional costs incurred in developing such projects. “People assume that a green building needs to have lots of PV panels and hot water panels, and automatic sensors all over the place – and of course, you can implement those measures, but they are not mandatory requirements,” responds Mario. “One of the main points that I’m keen on emphasising is that our approach to green building involves a zero cost premium,” he stresses. “A green building saves water and energy by getting the normal architects and developers to design and develop this into the project. Of course, in the Middle East, people have the money to spend – I recently heard that Dubai has the highest per capita retail spending in the Middle East – but the key is to get them to spend it wisely. Having that outlook will result in more water and energy being saved.”

So, getting people to understand that green developments do not require piles of cash is obviously important. The next step is getting the right advocates on board, says Mario. “Even if the clients are in favour of developing a green building, the design and the contracting team may show some resistance due to lack of awareness and lack of knowledge in this area. It is therefore a case of educating and giving these individuals the confidence that the same effort is required. That said, such projects inevitably require a more organised and time-conscious effort – a more integrated approach. Once you have that increased awareness, then it is really a case of business as usual.”

Another important area of the green building sector – and Green Technologies FZCO’s project portfolio, representing 20 per cent of the company’s work – is retrofit projects. With a shorter payback period, plus similar expectations for reduced operating costs and increased building values when compared to new green buildings, there is no surprise that firms are increasingly looking at renovation options for increasing the efficiencies of existing structures. And savings on such projects can be huge, especially when such work is undertaken on structures as large as the Empire State Building

– its green retrofit will cut the building’s energy consumption by 40 per cent and will save about US\$4.4 million in power costs each year, while the retrofit will pay for itself in just three years.

Taking the LEED

With education perhaps the most crucial component in driving the adoption of green building development, Mario holds workshops across the Middle East to increase awareness and provide professionals with the tools to move forward confidently into the sustainability arena. “The workshop that we are holding at the Kuwait Big 5 show in September will be the ‘LEED 201: Core Concepts & Strategies’. For me, this is the most important class for anyone that wants to understand sustainable building. In the past, most of the people that have attended this class have come up to me afterwards and said, ‘You make sustainability sound so easy’ – and that is really my goal with LEED 201, to talk to anybody with an interest in sustainability. There is obviously a technology component to it, and it is our goal to make that very lucid – we find that people really appreciate that. They may come to the class with a sense of apprehension, but they leave it confident in what they should do,” says Mario, who advises that the workshop is suitable not only for architects, engineers and project managers, but also clients. “I would really encourage clients to come as it is important for them to understand that this is what they should be doing for their next generation of buildings, and that this will soon be a mandatory approach. Once the client understands the benefits, he will then drive the market. LEED 201 also promotes discussion on education, and will encourage those interested in pursuing professional credentials on how they can go about doing this. It builds awareness; it lays the groundwork for a technical understanding of what green building is, and will also set the stage for those looking to enter the educational side of the green building sector.”

Evidently, there is a combination of factors that will lead to a rise in the adoption of green building practices in the years ahead. Similar to fuel efficiency ratings for vehicles, rating and disclosing the energy performance of buildings is becoming increasingly common around the world. The next step will be to mandate environmental building requirements – something that Mario sees upcoming in his home market. Above and beyond this, the market demand for green, as seen through the strong adoption of such developments in Dubai – currently the Middle East’s most expensive city – indicates that the financial benefits of going green will likely be the greater catalyst for developers. □

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