

LAGOS AIRPORT IN-FLIGHT CATERING UNIT

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"We have gone from a monthly turnover of around \$250k to over \$1.5m and have had to add another 1000 square metres of storage space."

Richard Akerele – CEO,
Airline Services Limited.

Lagos is a major destination in West Africa and many well-known airlines serve the city. Until recently, they had to carry the catering for their return flight in the cargo holds, transferring it to the cabin as part of the turnround procedures at the airport.

Richard Akerele, CEO of Airline Services Ltd, saw the opportunity. British Airways were in the process of outsourcing and he bought their tray set-up facility which gave him an insight into the business. "I decided to build a proper in-flight catering unit. We did a feasibility study and raised the funding. I knew little about running such a unit so I asked around and got some knowledgeable people on board."

Duncan Hepburn FCSI of Hepburn Associates is an expert on in-flight catering units in the UK. "We were responsible for the design and coordination of all of Abela's airline catering units," he said, "and we also do most of Alpha Flight Services including some of their joint ventures abroad." Richard Akerele knew that the facility had to operate to European standards as the customers would require the

highest quality. "They had a team of Nigerian architects and M&E consultants based out there," says Hepburn "but they didn't know about airline requirements and the internal finishes, specifications and requirements needed to meet European standards. We went down there and spent some time talking them through the requirements and then brought them back to the UK and showed them some of the units we had been involved in."

Construction was completed within two years. "The consultants came to the UK again," Hepburn says, "and looked at various companies supplying drainage channels, ventilation systems, extractor fans and water treatment plants so that they could ascertain what they wanted. We then co-ordinated the final specification and supply of those items and arranged the shipping and the appropriate engineers who were needed to go out there and install them."

Nigeria has problems guaranteeing the consistency of any supplies so a production kitchen operating to European standards has to have back-up. Hepburn Associates put in 100 per cent back up on all the refrigeration with two sets of compressor plants for each cold room. There was also 100 per cent back up on the water treatment plant and while there was a mains electricity supply, a back up generator was specified as well.

"Future expansion was allowed for but in planning no-one expected the start of a new indigenous airline, Branson's Virgin Nigeria. Last year they were worth \$50,000 to us, this year they are worth over \$300,000 and they are expecting to double their business over the next year," says Akerele. "Since we have opened it increases the attractiveness of Lagos as a hub as the airlines can pick up catering. Duncan was up and down to Lagos at least a dozen times to supervise and we got on well. He's extremely good. He explained everything very well for us and saved us money. We got a great service."



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