Aiming to stand out from the crowd

One broking shop is treading a slightly different path from the rest of the pack.

Joe Brady **Rio de Janeiro**

The shipbrokers at Tide Maritime aren not afraid to blaze their own trail even if it makes them a little different from other local shops.

Tide, for instance, claims to be the only Brazilian brokerage with an office abroad, having set up shop in the trader hotbed of Geneva in 2008.

And while most other shipping-related companies base themselves in Rio's Centro business district or the adjoining neighbourhoods of Botafogo or Flamengo, Tide can be found in the heart of an upscale district called Leblon.

The location came after some careful thought and its start-up seven years ago in Botafogo, explained partners Gustavo Sa and Marcelo Magalhaes in an interview at their offices.

"Everyone in our office lives near this district," said Sa. "I live about seven minutes away by car and Marcelo lives on this very block.

"At the original location, we realised that with Rio traffic we were spending 90 minutes in the car every day, or 30 hours a month. So we decided to move to Leblon. By avoiding the commute, we can spend more time working, fix more ships and at the same time enjoy a better quality of life."

The brokers were working well into the evening on TradeWinds's visit and say they have built a steady business with their focus on ethanol, chemicals and crude cargoes.

While Tide is known to work with Petrobras, petrochemical operation Braskem and a variety of trading houses, the brokers decline to discuss details, citing confidentiality concerns.

Sa says Tide believes it can expand from its current staff of 13 between the two offices and eventually become the second big Rio broker after top shop BrazilShip/ ScanBrasil, which has a staff of 25.

But Sa stresses he is not looking at growth for growth's sake, or for expansion that will threaten the brokerage's ability to provide a personalised service.

"We don't intend to be the largest brokerage shop, acting in all sectors, but we want to provide the best service in our field," he said. "And our field is everything wet being transported by ships. We don't want to be like a fast-food shop — we see ourselves as an 'a la carte' or 'boutique' shop."

Tide took something of a chance in 2008 when it decided to plant its flag in Geneva but Sa says the gambit has paid off.

"We decided we could provide better service to our customers, not only with the time-zone difference but also the overview of the European market. We developed some great opportunities both for owners and charterers. For example, a perfect combination can be bringing acids in to supply fertilisers for agro business and then taking ethanol back out on the same vessel.

"It goes without saying that if you sit in Geneva, you're next to some of the world's leading traders — Dreyfuss, Glencore, Trafigura, Bungee — the list just goes on."

Tide hired veteran tanker executive Preben Krohnstad to head the Geneva operation. Sa calls him "a massive asset to the company". The office bolstered its expertise in acids with the hire of Roddy Delley.

Magalhaes and Sa communicate twice a week with the Geneva staff through a teleconference hook-up using a flat-screen monitor.

Magalhaes reveals that the monitor was used for another purpose during Brazil's appearance in the World Cup finals. But he hastens to point out that Tide confirmed a vessel fixture at half-time in one match.

"There's proof for you that what you've heard about Brazil is not true," he said. "Not all work comes to a stop when the national team is playing."

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TIDE MARITIME BROKERAGE: partners Gustavo Sa (left) and Marcelo Magalhaes

Photo: Joe Brady

SPECIAL LOCATION: The upmarket shoreline of Leblon where Tide Maritime is based

Partners have shipping in the blood

Tide Maritime's partners can legitimately claim that the oil and shipping industries run through their veins.

Marcelo Magalhaes's father once served as chartering manager for both Petrobras and mining giant Vale.

And Gustavo Sa's father is a former director of Interbras, which was once Petrobras's trading house before it was dissolved by the government in 1990.

After that job ended, Sa was able to follow his father to Paris for four years and observe his continued trading activity, including a famous deal that allowed Brazil to barter goods such as rice, beans, sugar and coffee in exchange for Iraqi light crude oil.

"We both have oil and shipping in our blood," Sa said.

"We should point out, though, that none of that history helps us with Petrobras today," Magalhaes added. "That was a long time ago and there have been many, many changes over the years."

Even with those genetics, it is not all work and no play for the Tide partners. Magalhaes enjoys taking his young son to the stadium on weekends to root for the local Fluminese football club.

And Sa is a dedicated surfer, having travelled more than 10 times to Indonesia, as well as Tahiti, the Fiji islands, Mexico and elsewhere. But work and a one-year-old daughter have limited his hobby a bit lately, he adds.

"Fixing a ship is as exciting as riding a wave," he said. "It gives you adrenaline and you always want one more."