

Getting to know...

Dr. Jun Zhang Atmos International

CEO Jun Zhang founded Atmos International in 1995. Together with her senior management team, she has grown the business to deliver pipeline leak detection systems to over 1500 pipelines. Graduating from UMIST in 1988, she started her career with Shell in the Netherlands and the UK. While at Shell she developed statistical pipeline leak detection. After leaving Shell and under license, she further developed and commercialised the system in-house, which became part of the product offering to Atmos International's worldwide customers.



Describe your current job role in one sentence

I'm the CEO of Atmos International, delivering pipeline leak detection and simulation solutions globally.

Did you always want to work in the pipeline industry?

Not really. It's through coincidence that I have ended up working in the pipeline industry. After my MSc in Control Systems at UMIST (now University of Manchester), I continued my research as a PhD student. One of the most important decisions I made was my PhD's topic of research. I wanted to do something practical and so I chose fault detection and diagnosis as I could apply it to chemical process plants. While finishing my PhD I learned that Shell needed someone to develop a pipeline leak detection system at their research laboratory in Amsterdam. I applied for the job, and that was how I started my career in the pipeline industry.

How did you get where you are today?

It has taken a while to get to where I am today. While working for Shell Research in Amsterdam I developed Shell's statistical pipeline leak detection system. After testing the system on an operational pipeline, Shell patented the technology and I moved to Shell UK's Stanlow Refinery in England. Then I became a Process Engineer at Shell International in the Hague. While working in the Hague, the international pipeline manager asked me to help get the statistical system working. A couple of years previously, Shell had given a license to a leak detection company in order to commercialise Shell's technology. Although I trained one of their engineers to use the technology, the external company could not make it work. I therefore decided to leave Shell and get a license to continue developing the leak detection system. This was also one of the most important decisions I made. I returned to Manchester in 1995 and started Atmos International from my bedroom in South Manchester before moving to the city's National Computing Centre in the city centre. To help grow my new business, I applied for the Smart Award for Innovation and won the financial support from the government to develop the leak detection system further.

Tell us something we might not know about your company

We have served over 215 clients in 60 countries, developed 18 software products and 10 hardware products in-house with our own R&D team and applied our products to over 1500 pipelines.

What's great about the pipeline industry?

It is a small world. Over the years I have met a lot of

outstanding people in the industry in different parts of the world. It is great to be part of the pipeline community.

What's not so great about the pipeline industry?

I suppose sometimes things take time particularly due to the nature of large capital investment involved in new pipeline projects. But I am not sure it can be changed.

Do you have a mentor in the industry?

For the first 15 years I didn't have a mentor. Looking back, I wish I had considered it sooner as I would have gained from it immensely. Today, I have a mentor, but he is not from the pipeline industry. This really helps as it gives a different perspective on a challenge that I may be facing. Also being part of the Academy of Chief Executives (now part of Vistage group) has been a great resource for learning and sharing experiences with fellow leaders.

Describe your ideal day off

Hiking along the Welsh coast. It is simply stunning, and I like the fact that it's relatively close to Manchester where I live and work. It's also a great location no matter what the time of year or weather conditions.

What is your favourite holiday/travel destination?

Skiing resorts are my favourite holiday destinations by far, although I now prefer the quieter resorts after a collision with another skier in a busier resort! I love skiing as it gives me the ability to totally disconnect from everything as you must concentrate on what you are doing (unlike the skier who collided with me). I like the challenge of the black runs and I think I'm fairly fearless too. It's also that the scenery is stunning with fresh and clear mountain air.

What motivates you to go to work every day?

Making Atmos a better place for my colleagues and our customers. Every day is about solving a problem for our customers, helping my colleagues develop and supporting one another. I see Atmos as a family and together we are focused on making a difference for our customers every single day. It's about the united challenge and making it rewarding and fun for each person.

What is your proudest career achievement?

Founding Atmos and making it a successful international business. We have achieved so much together and we are still passionate about what we do. We're excited for the future. 