

MANUFACTURING MATTERS

Interview with
TONY LOCKWOOD
MANAGING DIRECTOR
BOFA INTERNATIONAL



In a series of interviews with the directors of Dynamics Consultants, manufacturers talk about their ambitions and reveal the issues which are mission-critical for them to address in achieving their goals.

The interviews will be brought together as a report to be published by DECISION magazine and then as a digital book.



TONY LOCKWOOD HAS a vision: the managing director of BOFA International wants the company to be a £40million turnover business by 2020. It's quite an ambition, given that turnover is currently £25million, but the "exceptional growth" of the past few years has given him confidence.

The five-year plan set in 2015 by the company recognised as a world-leader in fume extraction and filtration technology has had to be revised upwards because the business was already exceeding its own expectations by early 2017.

To become a much bigger business, the company needs to behave like one, he says. In other words, it needs the right people and systems, procedures and policies to tread the path from being a small manufacturer. Lockwood says growth will highlight any weaknesses in the business that could impact on the ability to meet customer expectations. "You can potentially lose some flexibility because of rapid growth, but you can't be seen by customers to have lost any flexibility.

And what would keep him awake at night would be the inability to maximise opportunities. The challenge is having the right structure which would enable us to continue to be out there touching those opportunities."

With the aim of addressing this he launched an internal programme called Fit for Growth, which aims to get the currently 230 employees working together to ensure the business works efficiently. "The purpose of the programme is to make sure that everyone buys into the growth plan so that it's not just 'Tony Lockwood's dream'," he explains. "We need a management team and staff who believe we can achieve it. It's so we can decide if we are going left to right, or north to south, rather than just bump into things."

Part of his first-year plan after becoming managing director in 2015 was to make significant investments in IT and in R&D, notably an advanced ERP systems. "I would like us to be the company that brings the next technology into the market," says Lockwood. "For that to happen, we are always investing in manufacturing technology as well as in the technology to run the business."

It was in 1987 that BOFA International were established after founder Dave Cornell became the sole importer into the UK of a then unique, if rudimentary, Swedish filtration system for extracting harmful fumes from PCB assembly lines. Although there was limited customer understanding of the benefits of extraction, the company soon gained its single largest installation contract, with Phillips Telecommunications, which

had made the link between significantly improved air quality, a reduction in the number of sick days, and improved productivity.

Market demand grew steadily, especially after the introduction in 1991 of COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) regulations, which coincided with Cornell starting to design and manufacture his own extraction and filtration units, moving or extending the premises several times to reach the current 48,000sqft of space.

In the early days the company focused on dealing with fumes from the soldering process in electronics but subsequently there has been diversification into any kind of industrial process that creates fumes and dust, including printing, dental, and laser processes.

Selling into several separate sectors gives security, says Lockwood. "One of our key customer bases is a global network of distributors and OEMs." BOFA International retain ownership of the patented IP by selling under licence.

At the more expensive end of the product range, the selling point is more about reducing the cost of ownership, maximising uptime, and easy access to support. These are machines which are also easy to diagnose if something goes

wrong, thanks to BOFA's intelligent operating system (iQ). Customers just download machine performance data from the machine via a USB stick and then send the information to the helpdesk for analysis. "It means we can quickly assess an issue and the corrective actions which need to be implemented," Lockwood explains. "Our competitors can't do that. It means that an engineer knows exactly what parts to take with and can fix the problem straight away."

This sense of urgency is important, he says. "People in manufacturing have a greater sense of immediacy. If their line goes down they want it fixed straight away." In 2017, the company received the Queen's Award for Innovation for its iQ system,

Competition for similar quality products comes more from the US and Europe than China, but BOFA International have a point of difference, says Lockwood – a willingness, not just an ability to do bespoke work.

Manufacturers increasingly have to provide that 'total solution', he explains, which means working with customers from the early stages to work out what solution they need. "If the unit was the only value customers saw in us, it would be a risk as the product could become a commodified purchase," says Lockwood.

He originally joined the company as sales and marketing director, and in 2015 led a management buyout when the owner retired. The MBO was partly funded through private equity from LDC. "It's very clear that our job is to run the business and their job is to help us accelerate growth and capitalise on opportunities," he says.

One of the reasons the business was so attractive to investors is that its market is driven largely by health and safety regulations. "There's a massive productivity message because the use of suitable fume extraction in factories reduces absenteeism," Lockwood says. The products also reduce the cost of maintaining production plant because contamination can cause equipment to fail.

Even the potential erosion of health and safety legislation that has been hinted at in the government's talk about 'easing the burden of regulation' won't stop responsible companies from continuing to invest in the safety of their workforce, he believes. "Those which are looking to cut corners are the ones that won't survive as they will be cutting bigger corners elsewhere."

He is proud of being a UK based manufacturer. "That flag does add value," Lockwood believes. So the

intention is to continue to manufacture mainly in the UK but qualifies that by adding: "We have to be competitive and be flexible and realistic enough to adapt if something happened to changed the landscape."

A major proportion of sales go overseas - in fact 90% - mainly through global agreements with OEMs and distributors, and Lockwood sees much potential for growth with BOFA Americas Inc. The company won a Queen's Award for Export in 2012.

There are plans to open subsidiary offices elsewhere and in particular, Lockwood has fast-tracked the opening of a regional office in Germany to ensure a footprint in Europe. "Who really knows what will happen after Brexit, so this is our safety net," he says.

"To be part of a manufacturing story is wonderful. I'm in a very privileged position. We just have to make sure the business is as fit tomorrow as it is today and that means continuing to make the right investment decisions and to have a solid but flexible plan to deliver against. Part of my task has been attracting the right people in to help me share the task, including managers who know what good looks like."



Dynamics Consultants are made up of experts in business management software, from ERP solutions to e-Commerce websites, are approved as Microsoft Enterprise Resource Planning and nopCommerce partners, and provide consultancy, implementation, support, training and development services.

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