



Paul Meijering: “No mistakes, no compromise, just quality.”

For the past 30 years, Paul Meijering has successfully run his stainless steel and speciality alloy tubes, pipes, fittings and flanges distribution business based on his personal philosophy: no mistakes, no compromises, and an unrelenting focus on quality. His highly experienced and motivated team puts this philosophy into practice when delivering products to every corner of the globe. Stainless Steel World travelled to the Paul Meijering premises in Zaltbommel, the Netherlands, to meet with the owner Paul and his team and find out how this philosophy continues to drive the businesses' success.

By Joanne McIntyre

For three decades Paul Meijering has distributed stainless steel and speciality alloy products all over the globe with speed and calm professionalism. With over 11,000 articles on offer in ten different grades, a smooth organization is key, and the quietly busy, state-of-the-art distribution centre reflects this. “For thirty years I have made sure that we clear the in-box by the end of the day,” explains Paul. “Orders are shipped out on the same day they come in. Around 80% of our business

is providing materials to other stockists and traders. Over the years, many people have tried to tell me this is an impossible business model, yet here we are, still thriving! The fact that we don't chase projects means we have a very stable work order, allowing us to plan carefully and deliver all orders daily.”

Customer communication is key

Having worked in every aspect of the business – including ten years picking orders on the shop floor – Paul has

an intimate understanding of what it takes to succeed in the international distribution business.

“A large degree of our success stems from close communication with our customers. On receiving a large order, we immediately contact the client to ask: what do you need first? We immediately deliver the most urgent items, then make sure the rest arrives just-in-time for the client. Our customers appreciate this attention to detail which saves them time and streamlines their receiving processes.”



UK. In fact, I would say that for anyone looking for new business opportunities, go to the UK now! The best time to start a business is when business is slow because it can only improve. Citizens of the United Kingdom have been our friends for thousands of years, let's keep it like that!"

New tube laser cutter

Paul Meijering has provided tube cutting services to its clients for many years, providing machine builders and other customers with complex finished parts that are ready to install and available at very short lead times. This year the company took delivery of a new, fully automated tube laser cutter with the capacity to process tubes up to 230mm diameter.

"The new laser cutter is very sophisticated and allows us to offer excellent service to our customers. Fitted with a bunker, it is capable of processing entire bundles of tubes fully automatically, to very close specifications. Of course we have all the materials required in stock." Paul relishes investing in new technology, which will be of benefit to his customers. "New technology allows us to offer extra service and quality directly to end-users. I was prompted to make this investment based on feedback - particularly from the food industry end-users - who had difficulty finding laser cutting services." Products are always cut on the same day that they need to be delivered. "This ensures there are never mistakes; nothing gets put to one side and left to the next day. An entire batch is cut, checked, wrapped and shipped

immediately. If we reach a point when we are running out of capacity, we buy a new machine immediately to prevent any delays."

Customisation

The new tube laser cutter is housed in a well-equipped customisation department providing cutting, setting, edging, sawing, deburring, CNC turning, re-marking, and forming services, as well as chemical analysis. By the end of 2019 plasma cutting will also be available. The range of equipment is impressive, from laser cutters to plate rollers to presses, including a flatbed laser cutter capable of handling 6 x 2m stainless steel plate.

"Our customisation activities are equally divided between cutting and forming. The forming presses require a great deal of expertise; our highly skilled operator is now training five young people. While it's an ongoing process, in the first six months all customers were satisfied, and 100% placed a repeat order within that period."

With the majority of the customers coming from the food and beverage industry, most items require cold rolling and deburring for cleanliness, hygiene and safety. "These customers have exacting standards where compromise is not an option. This fits perfectly with our business philosophy and we relish the chance to demonstrate our commitment to quality."

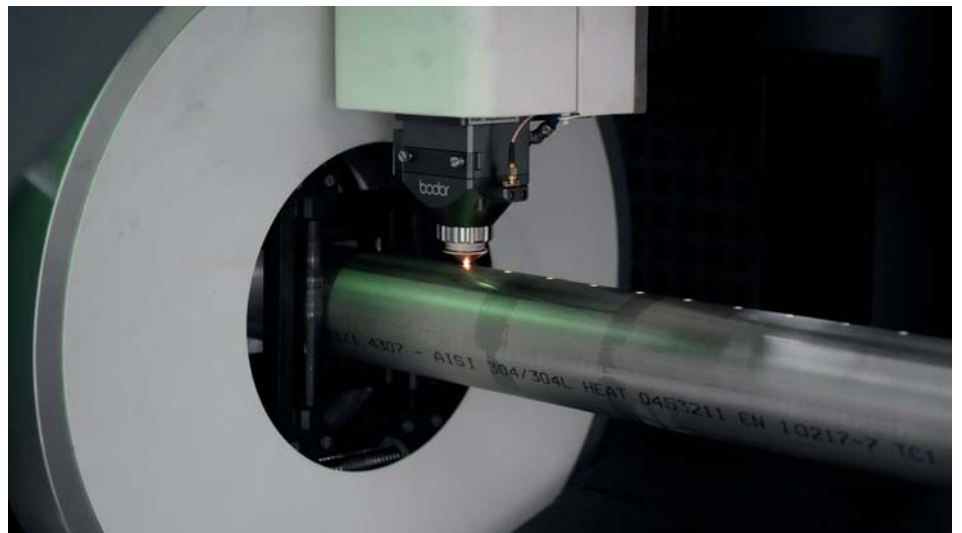
Paul is keen to point out that he does not sell plates and sheets to his laser cutting and forming customers, only parts. "We are careful to avoid competing with our supplier customers who provide those items," he explains.

"Following the same principle, if they urgently need something today, we will get it to them...even if it's five o'clock on a Friday evening. Our automated system will find, pick and pack an order within five minutes. We never say no."

Anticipating Brexit

For decades Paul Meijering has exported to and imported from the United Kingdom. The impending Brexit has caused many businesses to become skittish about their UK clients; however, Paul insists that business, as usual, will continue.

"This year, I made a point of visiting all of my UK customers to reassure them that we have no intention of reducing our business activities with the UK. Politics is a big factor in our business, from the US to China to the UK. However we don't deal in politics, we deal in alloys. I had the same attitude during the Iceland crisis. We supported our clients in Iceland through those difficult times, and we will do the same with the



A new, fully automated tube laser cutter has the capacity to process tubes up to 230mm diameter.



Laser cut items are a specialism that Paul's team provides for a wide range of customers.



Around 99% of the material processed for customers sourced from the company's existing stock.

The customisation services are a huge success, with the press room booked at 80% capacity for the long term. Paul is now investigating how he can reorganise the space to increase efficiency and automation to fill multiple orders simultaneously. He is also in the process of handing full responsibility for customisation orders to the technical department. "The operator carrying out cutting and forming will also do the sales and materials purchasing. You can't expect salespeople to be knowledgeable about flatbed and tube lasers; it's a completely different profession. Removing salespeople from the process will improve efficiency and quality without raising cost."

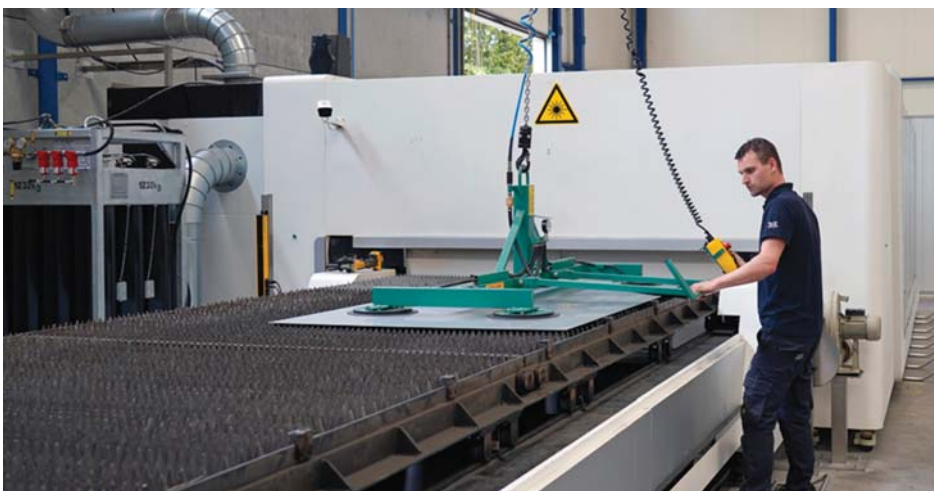
It's a great advantage that 99% of the material processed is sourced from the company's existing stock. "We process all orders on the day they are

received, while urgent requests can be collected within 30 minutes."

High-tech quality control

Paul's focus on quality extends to the processes used to receive, store, trace, package and deliver products to customers. Incoming tubes and fittings are quickly unloaded then carefully scrutinised. Inspections start with a visual check – is there any evident damage to the packaging or the contents? Have the right number of tubes been delivered in each crate? Does the heat number and grade stamp on each tube tally with the shipping documents? A portable chemical analysis monitor is used to verify that the pipes have the stated composition. The wall thickness is determined using callipers, while an endoscope is available to check the internal cleanliness of small diameter tubes. Finally, the tubes are weighed;

as equally sized tubes have a constant weight, their combined mass is a reliable indicator of the number of tubes being stored or later retrieved. Finally, they are whisked away on an automatic tube stacker to one of hundreds of storage locations. The order picking department is a spotlessly clean, spacious area dominated by several huge Hänel Lean-Lifts as well as a Fehr Honeycomb warehousing system which soars high overhead. When an order is selected at a local computer terminal, one of the Lean-Lifts automatically hums into action. A few seconds later, a large tray with multiple compartments emerges at the perfect working height. An illuminated arrow indicates the specific compartment containing the items that are needed. The operator counts out the exact number and immediately confirms how many remain in stock. With the parts correctly identified and counted out they are carefully boxed and labelled, so the recipient knows exactly what it contains. For larger orders, components are bagged then encased in suitable protective materials such as bubble-wrap plastic or foam to prevent any damage during transit. Individual pipes are laid on a wooden plank to avoid bending before being fully wrapped in plastic. "Anything can occur during transportation. A box might fall off a pallet or be thrown carelessly about by a driver. That's why we package all our items with the utmost care to ensure that whatever happens, the client will receive the parts he needs in perfect order," Paul explains.



The extensive range of customization equipment includes a flatbed laser cutter capable of handling 6 x 2m stainless steel plate.

While the team has the very latest technology at their disposal, what is most notable is the way each member works methodically, with care, precision and real dedication.

Continual growth

Rather uniquely in the industry, the Paul Meijering business grew enormously during the years of the economic crisis. "There is a simple explanation for this," explains Paul. "We maintained our stocks at the same level, whereas our competitors all reduced their stocks in an effort to save money. They quickly ran their stocks down, so they were no longer able to meet the needs of the market. We did exactly the opposite by maintaining and even increasing our stocks. As a result, we actually doubled our turnover two years in a row! Essentially, we supplied when nobody else could and were able to reap the benefits. Today the economic climate has improved, so our growth is now around 15% per year, although we are still happy with that."

Materials

As a specialist supplier of stainless steels and special alloys, in 2018 Paul expanded the product offering to include alloy 825. "Demand for alloy 825 has proven to be steady for the chemical and oil & gas industries, where it's superior salt-water resistance make it a better option than duplexes. We plan to develop this market at a measured pace. Today we stock both welded and seamless tubes and pipes in alloy 825." All of the distributors seamless stock is sourced from within Europe, Paul explains. "We aim to constantly move up the value chain, supplying high-end alloys for demanding applications."



The high-tech order picking department is dominated by several huge lifts which automatically pick up trays of products and present them at exactly the right height for the machine operator to access.

Demand for duplex and super duplex is strong, explains Paul. "Order for duplexes come in every single day, particularly for the repair business. Like all orders, these are dispatched on the same day they are received." In the receiving area, 100% of the products arriving are checked: every single tube, pipe and fitting. "We guarantee that your order will contain exactly what you expect, no exceptions. When we take on new people the first thing we teach them is that doing a job well is better than doing a job quickly. It's actually a complex thing to teach people to slow down, take their time and do it right 100% of the time."

Experienced staff are priceless

Paul readily admits that the most valuable asset in his business in his

team of experienced professionals. Walking through the premises, it is remarkably quiet; there is no stress, no raised voices. "Experienced people are priceless," he smiles. "The team is completely focused when they are working. In 30 years of operation we have never had a significant accident, although safety remains a constant point of attention. We pay a lot of attention to improving processes to ensure people work safely, no matter how long they have been with us. The strength of our company is that we do everything together. That includes me; I enjoy jumping in to help wherever I'm needed to get the job done. We have a policy to hire before we need someone, to anticipate the need, so we have time to train people. Experienced people are irreplaceable!"



A high degree of automation and the company philosophy of taking the time to do the job right has practically eliminated errors.

Facts & Figures

- Stocks ten grades of stainless steel and special alloys
- Stocks over 11,000 articles such as pipes, tubes, sheets, flanges, fittings and components
- Exports to over 55 countries daily
- Ships 99% of all orders the same day
- Can machine threads on flange bolt holes on demand
- Is certified to re-mark tubes using soft, hard and laser markings.
- Has CNC machine and laser cutter to produce ready-to-install components
- Established 1989, currently 60+ employees

Website: www.paulmeijering.nl/en/