



TW Metals takes service to the next level

What's needed to run a customer-centric distribution business? Well how about a comprehensive product portfolio, fast and reliable deliveries, in-house processing facilities, top quality materials from leading sources, a deep understanding of customer applications and the flexibility to fulfil all orders be they large or small. This at least is how TW Metals has for decades successfully differentiated itself in the market for high performance alloys.

By David Sear

Visit TW Metals Ltd in Southampton, UK, and you'll find a distinct sense of satisfaction and optimism. This is the headquarters of TW Metals' European and Asian operations and where managers are keenly aware of the excellent, all-round performance of their many business activities. When asked about this long-term success story, Mike Street (Regional Director – Speciality Distribution) said they can be ascribed to how TW Metals approaches its customers.

“In one sense our model follows the traditional distribution set-up: we buy, stock and sell goods. But what I can confidently state is that we always strive to deliver the best possible quality, both as regards our product and also our service level. This is why we enjoy the patronage of so many regular customers who value us as partners. They know that with TW Metals peace of mind comes with every order.”

TW Metals has always been known for its stocks of higher alloys required by the aerospace and other demanding industries such as oil & gas. However, of late the company has been ramping up investments in grades at the commodity end of the spectrum. Mr. Street: “we are continuing to expand our stocks of 316 bar, currently around the 500 ton level. Previously our company was seen as a niche product supplier with high performance metals for critical



TW Metals complements its vast product portfolio with extensive processing capabilities, such as this Schelling fm10 plate cutter.

Smart investments

Like other successful businesses, TW Metals has a keen ear for market changes and knows exactly when and where to invest in new facilities or wider stock levels. In that respect it is interesting to note that TW Metals is set to open a new warehouse in Poland. Asked about this investment, Mr. Street commented: “many aerospace customers are investing in manufacturing activities in and around Poland. Anticipating further growth in demand we are therefore replacing our existing building with a larger facility and enhancing stock levels and processing capabilities”

In a similar vein, Mr. Street also revealed that TW Metals is actively looking for a new, larger facility in Italy with further expansion in France also a distinct possibility.

Another headline investment that was finalised just last year was the acquisition of UK-based Locate Supplies. Locate Supplies stocks a range of materials, including aluminum, stainless, copper, brass and bronze, as well as high-performance plastics. Commented Mr. Street: “this acquisition has further added to our product portfolio. Moreover, Locate has helped enhance our processing capabilities in terms of advanced water jet cutting as well as reverse engineering & parts finishing.”

The Locate name will be familiar to many manufacturing companies throughout the UK, especially those active in the food and marine sectors plus machine shops. “What impressed

us with Locate is their focus on value-added services and exceptional customer service level, accompanied by their forward thinking management team,” commented Mr. Street. “This was therefore an ideal match with us as, operating under their own brand, Locate have been able to use our very strong infrastructure as a stepping stone to expand their business. They too have booked record figures for 2018 and the first half of 2019.”

Knowledge in-house

A common denominator throughout TW Metals’ activities is the incredible width and depth of technical knowledge amongst front-line staff. The sales force in the UK alone represents over 150 years of experience, much of which is ‘home grown’, said Mr. Street proudly. “There simply isn’t a bespoke sales and technical course which is relevant

and hazardous environments. However, listening to feedback we have decided to offer a more rounded portfolio. These decisions have gone down exceptionally well amongst our customers.”

Irrespective of the actual grade, it goes without saying that TW Metals only works with top-tier mills with whom it has developed close relationships.

“We will never compromise on the quality of our product, whether tubes, pipes, sheets or bar, that we deliver to customers and we would never consider quick-fix, low-cost solutions. Indeed, to describe us as a simple buyer and seller does not do proper justice to our overall involvement; thanks to our contract management activities we have full control of the entire supply chain right from the melt source up until the final end user. Again, ensuring we create that essential peace of mind for all of our customers,” explained Mr. Street.

About TW Metals

- Main activity: stocking and processing tube, pipe, bar, hollow bar, extrusions, sheet and plate
- Metals: nickel alloy, stainless steel, titanium, aluminium, and engineering plastics.
- Forms: both seamless and welded, available in standard mill finishes or polished condition
- Key sectors: aerospace, oil & gas, offshore, pumps and valves, heat transfer, distribution business
- Locations: over thirty stocking locations worldwide

From expansion in the UK...

To support the growing number of customers, Locate Supplies will soon be relocating its Peterborough (UK) operation into a purpose-built facility. This new building will quadruple the available floor-space



and boast a range of new machinery including two Amada HFA400W fully automatic bandsaws which can cut up to 16" diameter round bar plus a Schelling Fm8 plate saw complete with Erbo extraction system. In addition to new racking, a Combilift C3000ET electric side-loader forklift will ensure items can be quickly and efficiently stored and retrieved.

to our businesses. Therefore success in sales is down to hiring individuals with customer-service backgrounds with a desire and passion to learn and we give them every opportunity to do so. That's why we organize regular in-house courses, bring in consultants and attend external technical events with mill partners and customers alike. Moreover we take the time to visit our end-user customers and our suppliers. Not just for business, but to discuss applications and emerging technologies. Recently for example we visited Sandvik to hear about their latest offering of grades and their capabilities. With a deeper understanding of properties such as machinability, corrosion resistance, weldability, etc, TW Metals' sales staff are ideally positioned to give clients reliable and useful information. And as I said before, this provides real peace of mind for the customer, that when dealing with TW Metals you can rely not only the highest quality products and technical advice but a service level that exceeds expectations.

Ultra-fast deliveries

In an era where outsourcing seems to be the mantra TW Metals continues to operate a fleet of delivery lorries. Asked why, Mr. Street gave an unequivocal reply. "Simple. With our own trucks we have total control of the complete logistics chain thereby

offering faster solutions for our customers. Here's an example: we might receive an emergency order late Monday afternoon. Staff can work through the night to select pipes, cut plates to size and even perform basic first-stage machining operations. The completed order can be loaded onto our lorry for immediate dispatch with the customer receiving the parts he needs early on Tuesday. Beat that for service!"

Mr. Street laughed when asked if he was trying to eclipse Amazon. "Perhaps we can't quite replicate the

service provided by massive online enterprises but we really will go a long way to meet customers' expectations. In a world which operates on a now, now, now basis, service and flexibility are key. That's why we don't do 'out of the box' sales as no two customers and no two orders are ever alike. Instead we quickly adapt to each customer's unique needs."

In passing, Mr. Street mentioned the abbreviation 'AOG'. Asked to elaborate, he explained that the term stands for 'Aircraft On Ground', used to describe an emergency maintenance situation in the aviation industry.

"Airlines run to tight schedules so if an aircraft is kept on the tarmac for unscheduled repairs then maintenance teams have to respond immediately. And as a preferred supplier our response has to be equally swift. Hence we have developed a suite of services to accommodate aerospace clients. Now it was actually the AOG concept that set us thinking: if we can provide such a service level to one industry, then surely we can do that for other sectors too! So currently we are working on expanding this service to all our customer groups, such as motor sports. Yes this is an ambitious target but it demonstrates the mentality of service which exists throughout TW Metals."

Forward thinking

Queried about future plans, Mr. Street revealed topics discussed during a recent strategy meeting. These included assessing how TW Metals could further

... to growth in Poland



On mainland Europe, too, TW Metals is investing in response to growing customer demand. The massive new facility in Poland, for example, will support growing demands from aerospace customers amongst others. The 7000 square-metre production hall will boast bar saws, tube saws, a sheet cutting facility (guillotine) plus a plate saw that is scheduled to arrive in 2020.

its activities in motorsport, transport at the medical industry. As ever, the approach is based on gaining a solid understanding of customers and their needs. "Success will be down to good old-fashioned research into markets and applications. Then we will build relationships and develop networks, all the while garnering trust in our ability to provide quality products at realistic prices. We certainly won't be trying to undercut the competition, after all you pay for what you get. Instead we will ensure we deliver a better product and superior service than anyone else in the market," said Mr. Street.

In the meantime TW Metals will continue to fine-tune its portfolio. Nickel alloys are for example very much in the spotlight, thanks to the increasingly buoyant oil and gas sector, noted Mr. Street. "The hydrocarbon industry has long constituted an important market for us and one where we have supplied a considerable volume of nickel alloys. However, due to market forces our sales have tended to focus on specific pockets of activity. With this industry undergoing a renaissance our plans are to invest in nickel alloy bar meeting API and NORSOK specifications. These would perfectly complement our tubular, stainless & nickel alloy offering. Furthermore these such grades are also dual certified wherever possible to the likes of AMS specifications which will undoubtedly benefit our aerospace customers." "As you can see, we are truly a multi-metals company with a proven track-record for serving many markets," concluded Mr. Street. "Historically, our focus was in long products for

The pros of in-house machining

As well as cutting tubes, pipes and plates, TW Metals can perform basic first-stage machining. However, Mr. Street is adamant that this service is to support – and not compete with – engineering customers. "We create basic shapes for clients so they can focus on their core engineering activities. This service offers many advantages for the customer: finished products can be quickly produced with fewer machining steps, there is less scrap for them to dispose of and the lower weight helps minimise transportation costs."



commercial sectors. That was the foundation of our organisation - our DNA if you like - and over the years we've adapted and evolved to meet emerging market needs. We are fortunate enough to have the flexibility and understanding in our organisation to manage the many changes required to keep up with the pace of today's ever-changing industries, whilst maintaining one constant core value...service, of which we will never compromise. Irrespective of the industry all of our customers ultimately require the same thing, quality products that are delivered on time. How we achieve this is our USP but I can say that we have developed unique and bespoke sales tools to ensure we meet our customer demands. This is just one of the reasons we have become so successful and dominant in the aerospace sector and of course

we are transferring the best-practices learnt here into other markets as well. As the message about our excellent supply chain management continues to spread more and more customers are approaching us requesting we widen our scope into new markets and products. I am delighted to say we are responding positively: first we added on additional product forms such as aluminium plate and later we invested in in-house facilities to cut products to size. Off the top of my head we now have four Shelling plate saws and five waterjet cutting systems in the UK alone! So as I trust this interview will have demonstrated, our ethic is the absolute opposite of empty promises and fast money. Here at TW Metals our focus is on the long term, whereby we foster and maintain win-win relationships with all our customers."

TW Metals a preferred distributor for Sandvik

In 2018 Sandvik announced that TW Metals UK would become a preferred distributor for a range of products including Sandvik hydraulic & instrumentation tubing and high temperature piping products in England.

Helen Harvey, Sandvik's Regional Sales Director UK, Ireland & Turkey, said: "We are pleased to be working with such an established and reputable company and are sure that working together we will be able to increase the market share for Sandvik."

Sandvik manufactures hydraulic & instrumentation tubing in imperial sizes from 1/8" to 1" and in metric sizes 3mm up to 50mm. The company also offers an extensive range of tubular products in austenitic and high nickel alloy grades.

The Sandvik program of high-temperature tubes includes a wide range of austenitic stainless steels and nickel alloys as well as iron-chromium-aluminium (FeCrAl) alloys, which can be used at temperatures up to 1250°C (2280°F).

Mike Street, Regional Director for TW Metals, said: "We've enjoyed a long-standing relationship with Sandvik, our business strategies and aspirations are closely aligned. Forging a partnership with Sandvik has enabled TW to expand its provision of high quality products combined with exceptional service and the added benefit of Sandvik's technical expertise to support our customers. The alliance of our two companies, both very prominent and well-established names in the metals industry, will undoubtedly be mutually beneficial to our customers."