



BIBUS Metals AG: supplier and problem solver

Leading distribution network in Europe for high-tech alloys

For the past 20 years Bibus Metals (Wallisellen, Switzerland and Düsseldorf, Germany) has been one of the leading distributors and stockholders in Switzerland, Austria and Germany for nickel and nickel alloys, CP titanium and titanium alloys, and zirconium, tantalum, niobium and composite materials. More recently, companies in the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary were set up. To get to know this stockholder and distributor better, we travelled to Switzerland to talk with Mr. Martin Vonmoos (Managing Director of Bibus Metals AG, Switzerland) and Mr. Schwarz (Managing Director of Bibus Metals GmbH, Germany).

Although Bibus Metals AG has been around for more than 20 years, the company may not yet be known that well outside German-speaking countries, so it seems like a good idea to start by giving a brief outline of the compa-

Bibus Metals is one of the leading distributors of high-tech alloys for the German-speaking countries

ny's history. Mr Vonmoos, Managing Director of Bibus Metals AG (Wallisellen, Switzerland), relates: "Bibus Metals AG was founded in 1979 as the exclusive distributor of Inco Alloys International (Special



Hemisphere in nickel alloy cut by water by Bibus' subcontractor Waterjet.

Metals since 1999), at that moment the world's leading producer of nickel and nickel alloys, for Switzerland. Soon Bibus Metals set up a warehouse in the Basle region. This location was carefully chosen because of the many chemical and pharmaceutical companies located there. From the stock of this warehouse we could deliver all kinds of semi-finished items made of nickel and nickel alloys. Some years after the set up the warehouse, however, we realised that there was also a growing market for custom-made products and services, so Bibus Metals AG added a service centre to the warehouse."

Mr Schwarz, Managing Director of Bibus Metals GmbH (Düsseldorf, Germany) continues the story: "In 1990 Bibus Metals also obtained the official representation for Austria and Germany from Inco Alloys International and opened offices in both these countries and also another warehouse in Germany. After this Bibus Metals became known as the leading supplier of heat and corrosion-resistant materials for the German-speaking countries. The German subsidiary is called Bibus Metals GmbH, and we supply nickel and nickel alloys, CP titanium and titanium alloys as well as stainless steels."

Mr Vonmoos takes up the story again and says: "In 1992 the Bibus Group also set up a company in the Czech Republic, in 2000 in Poland and, finally, in March 2001 in Hungary. In all of these countries Bibus Metals set up an office as well as a warehouse. As of towards the end of last century, because of the globalisation of the market and quickly developing communication technology, Bibus Metals thought the time had come to establish relations with producers other than Special Metals, who had taken over Inco Alloys, in order to enlarge the portfolio with products Special

Metals did not produce. As a result, we are proud to say that we are now the recognised distributor in the German-speaking countries and parts of eastern Europe for renowned companies such as Allegheny Ludlum (USA), for Fondinox (Italy) and Titania (Italy)". Starting with a focus on nickel and nickel alloys the company quickly added titanium and titanium alloys to its product portfolio. As in 1995 the price of titanium came significantly down and, realising the growing demand for titanium as a substitute for nickel alloys in certain areas, this was the starting-point for the company to zero in on new markets and build up a stock in titanium. "We can now supply CP titanium Grades 1, 7 and 11 in sheets and plates, Grade 2 in sheets, plates, round bar and pipes and tubes, either seamless or welded, the common type Grade 5 in round bars, and Grade 5 ELI also in round bars. The latter materials are a special quality titanium and very popular for medical applications such as surgical implants", Mr Vonmoos explains. Can titanium replace nickel alloys?

Mr Schwarz explains: "Because of the excellent corrosion resistance of titanium it is increasingly used in salt water and marine environments, as experienced with desalination plants, as well as in the chemical industry because of its exceptional resistance to acids, alkalis and all kinds of industrial chemicals. Because of its good strength-to-weight ratio, titanium also permits the use of thinner walled equipment, which is an advantage in a variety of industries, such as the aerospace industry. Titanium also has a superior erosion resistance and high heat transfer efficiency. All in all, CP titanium and titanium alloys are very cost-effective materials".

The popularity of titanium is shown by the fact that sales nowadays account for about 30% of the company's entire sales volume. Besides titanium and titanium alloys, Bibus Metals stocks zirconium, tantalum, niobium and composite materials. The main part of the sales volume, however, is taken up by nickel and nickel alloys. Mr Vonmoos: "Nickel alloys are popular in an enormous range of industries because of their good mechanical properties, their resistance to a range of corrosive media such as chemicals and alkalis, as well as their excellent corrosion re-



New warehouse in Poznan (Poland)

sistance. Pure nickel is therefore often used to maintain product purity in the processing of food, synthetic fibres and alkalis. Nickel furthermore has a high electrical conductivity, a high Curie temperature and good magnetic properties, so other typical applications for pure nickel are the electrical and electronic components industry. Because of its relatively high thermal conductivity nickel is also often used for heat exchangers. Moreover, nickel is also used for precious-metals cladding because it can be cold-worked to relatively high strength levels while maintaining ductility.”

Other applications where nickel alloys are used include marine engineering, (petro)chemical and hydrocarbon processing, nuclear engineering, industrial furnaces, gas turbine and heat-treating equipment, pressure vessels, aerospace, waste treatment, tanks and piping for cryogenic fluids, and pulp and paper production. “Some of our recent orders involved rocket parts for the “Ariane”, a salt plant in the Czech Republic, and a large melamine plant in Poland, for which an enormous quantity of tubes and plates were required,” Mr Vonmoos tells us.

SOLVING PROBLEMS

The semi-finished nickel and titanium products that are stocked by Bibus Metals include sheets, plates, bars, wire as well as seamless and welded tubes. A range of elbows, reductions, tees, collars, fittings, flanges, bolts and nuts

in most common sizes, and welding consumables like wire and electrodes can also be supplied from stock. Mr Vonmoos: “We can also supply forged items, either in rough size or fully machined, as well as centrifugally cast tubes in stainless steel as well as in nickel alloys. As an additional service we can offer laser cutting, plasma cutting and water jet cutting. Besides this we can provide services such as shearing, sawing, hammer forging, heat treatment, re-stamping, fully machined components to finish size, certificates and test reports. All our materials are delivered with copies of the original mill test reports.”

In line with this, but perhaps as a service you would not expect from a distributor and stockholder, is the support Bibus Metals can provide in solving application problems. Mr

More than nickel and titanium

Although Bibus is a well-known name in the German-speaking part of the world when it comes to nickel and nickel alloys as well as titanium and titanium alloys, there is more to the Bibus Holding than just metals. Mr Vonmoos, Managing Director of Bibus Metals AG (Wallisellen, Switzerland), relates: “The Bibus Holding company, located in Switzerland, consists of a broad range of company sections, involving hydraulic systems and components, pneumatic and electrical controls, robotics, electronics, rails for trains, and, last but not least, a range of companies producing and/or trading metals. To this metal section belong sister companies Sauter Edelstahl AG, a leading distributor, service and stockholding company for stainless steels, BIBUS -Uto Stahl AG, Kneubühler Ing. AG, a company that is active in precision casting and precise profiling, and Bibus Metals, distributor and stockholder of nickel and nickel alloys, CP titanium and titanium alloys and zirconium, tantalum, niobium and composite materials.”

Vonmoos explains this further by saying: “The main focus of our company is on service: our customers should not merely see us as a stockholder who sells parts but as a company that provides a lot of added value. Besides the already mentioned custom-made components, we can also give expert advice on what material is best suited for an application and therefore employ works engineers and metallurgists. Whereas in most countries it is more common for a distributor or stockholder to have inside and outside sales people, we have the advantage of having only one, knowledgeable sales team, so that expert advice can be given on site.”

“The higher the demands and the more technical it gets, the more difficult it is to sell via regular sales channels. If you buy more sophisticated materials you expect more advice”, Mr Schwarz believes. “With stainless steels there are a lot of standard materials which you can simply order in. We, however, think that the information we are able to give about our products is vital to the customer. We often discuss the problems on site to find the right material solution for our customer. Doing this, we usually find that price is not the most important issue. First of all we have to find the right solution for the specifications, requirements and demands the customer has.”

CUSTOMER PACKAGES

But the service certainly does not end here, as becomes clear when Mr Vonmoos explains about the customer packages Bibus Metals provides. “Our main interest is to offer the customer tailor-made packages in a relatively



Cutting to customers specifications is one of many services Bibus Metals offers

short time: we have more and more large orders, from the chemical industry for instance, for which welded tubes, forged flanges and rings, as well as all kinds of fittings etc. are required. We can supply all these items; partly standard products from stock, partly products that are specially made by us or by one of our sub-contractors. We only have a few sub-contractors, with whom we stay in close contact so that we can keep the quality of our products at the high level our customers are used to and expect from us. We are thus able to meet all important quality requirements from large companies as well as organisations like Lloyd’s and Stoomwezen.” Another important issue which makes the company stand out from the crowd is the after-sales service Bibus Metals provides. Mr Vonmoos enlightens us further on this: “After we have supplied our materials and certificates we contact our customer to ask whether everything is to their satisfaction, whether everything they ordered arrived in time and in the correct state, what their plans for the future are, whether they will be needing additional certification or

testing, etc. We can then react to these findings, if necessary.” And being on the subject of plans for the future, what will the future hold for Bibus Metals? Mr Schwarz does not hesitate in answering: “In the near future our focus will certainly be on eastern Europe. It is a fast growing market, especially the waste incineration field, as there is a lot of room for improvement there.” Mr Vonmoos also sees a lot of possibilities in eastern European countries: “We will remain one of the leading stockholders and distributors of nickel and titanium alloys in

German-speaking countries as well as in eastern European countries, including Romania and Croatia. Other areas of interest to us are Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Not only are the eastern European countries developing very fast, an increasing number of western European countries have sub-contractor companies in these countries. So far these sub-contractors have been using carbon steel and a small amount of stainless steels, but they are now beginning to see that they have a lot of catching up to do. So I believe that a huge potential lies here for us.”

FACTS & FIGURES

Company name:	BIBUS Metals AG
Headquarters:	Wallisellen, Switzerland
Founded:	1979
Parent company:	BIBUS Holding AG
Sister company:	BIBUS Metals GmbH
Sales companies:	BIBUS Metals Sp.z o.o. (Poland), BIBUS Metals (Austria), BIBUS Metals (Hungary), BIBUS Metals (Czech Republic)
Materials:	Nickel and nickel alloys, titanium and titanium alloys
Represent:	Special Metals Corporation (UK & USA), Allegheny Ludlum (USA), Fondinox (Italy), Titania (Italy) and others