

Rolled Alloys: committed to customer service



Founded in 1953, Rolled Alloys specialises in supplying specialty metals for many global industries.

Through decades of expansion and growth, the company has remained firmly focused on its main goals: to provide its customers with high-quality products and the best possible service. Company President Thomas Nichol and Executive Vice President Kenneth Reinke spoke to *Stainless Steel World* about their commitment to global service with a local focus.

By Sarah Thompson and Joanne McIntyre

Rolled Alloys' journey to becoming a major player in, among others, the heat treatment, thermal processing, chemical processing, power generation and aerospace markets, was achieved through continual growth, investments in technology, strategic acquisitions and dedication to customer service. "We have positioned ourselves as a cost effective supplier," Dr. Nichol explains, "able to offer a multitude of reliable services to our customers. Through our increased number of locations across the world, we have spent a lot of time ensuring that we focus all of our energy on excellent customer service."

The Rolled Alloys' customer service combines worldwide availability and leading edge technology in combination with high-quality products and technologically advanced, electronic services.

GLOBAL VERSUS LOCAL

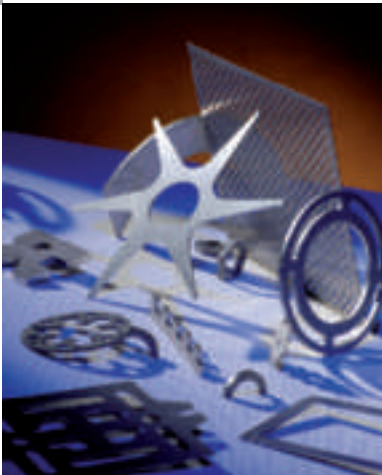
Starting with the 1993 purchase of Atek Metals Centre, a specialty metals distribution company primarily active in the aerospace industry, Rolled Alloys has undergone significant geographic growth. "With locations in Cincinnati, Ohio, Hartford, Connecticut, San Diego, California in the US and Sheffield, England, Atek was our initial entry into the aerospace business" Dr. Nichol continues. "In 2002 we acquired Castle Metals in Blackburn (United Kingdom) where we carried out major investments in computer systems and processing equipment including laser processing, plasma burning, water jet cutting, shearing, bar cutting and bar machining. Blackburn is our European aerospace centre of excellence. In 1998, Weaver Steel, Houston, Texas was acquired to strengthen Rolled Alloys' involvement in the chemical processing market and to expand our



Rolled Alloys' multi-lingual customer service team located in Breda, The Netherlands.

plate processing capabilities. The Houston facility has the capability to plasma burn thick (up to 7 inches) plate and saw up to 30-inch diameter bars. Expansion continued in 2003 with the acquisition of Harvey Titanium based in Santa Monica, California. This acquisition expanded our product line to include titanium alloys and increased our range of aerospace customers and quality approvals."

With global reach and technological investments high on the company's agenda, Dr. Nichol was pleased to announce the company's latest expansions. "We recently doubled our Cincinnati facility, adding an advanced laser cutting system and a material nesting system that maximizes material yields. We have also invested in the Temperance, Michigan facility by adding 7,000 square feet of office space and 32,000 square feet to our processing facilities." Moreover, Rolled Alloys continues this same momentum of expansion with its Chinese venture. "This year we will open a processing centre



Rolled Alloys is known for its considerable processing capacity.

in Suzhou Industrial Park outside of Shanghai," Dr. Nichol announces. "A new Rolled Alloys facility has been opened in Edmonton, Canada to serve the oil, gas and corrosion industries," he adds.

When asked how Rolled Alloys manages to keep the company's focus on its customers with such wide-spread locations, Dr Nichol answered: "That's quite simple. We are a global company with a local focus."

A recent project nicely sums up the international nature of Rolled Alloys. The company dealt with a major OEM headquartered in America. The project involved supplying product to two different European countries. "Our local people on the ground in those locations and our efficient internal communication systems meant we were able to give them the products they wanted, in European sizes, with a price in euros. And we were able to do it in their languages! We have local people on the



To provide an even better service to its Asian customers, Rolled Alloys has also opened an office in Singapore.

ground wherever our customers need us and we can modify our services to the local culture."

EXPANSION

The company is also expanding its workforce, with new sales personnel being employed in Germany, France, Italy, Czech Republic, Spain, China, Malaysia and Indonesia. This will be a significant addition to the company's multi-national capabilities. "Today over 40% of our business is in aerospace, 20% is in thermal processing, 20% in the Chemical/Petrochemical industry and 20% in the power generation business. About 15% of our US business is for export. If we include what we sell in local markets through our Asian and European operations, our international sales are greater than 30% of our total sales. A large proportion of our customers are pleased to be able to communicate with us in their own languages," comments Mr. Reinke.

With this continual growth come additional benefits to the company's broad customer base. Mr. Reinke continues, "Our acquisitions over the years have gained us a large and varied product range. We can now offer an extensive inventory in plate, sheet, bar, pipe, fittings, and welding materials in heat resistant, corrosion resistant, and high temperature alloys. Additionally, we guarantee the highest quality standards, of course including all international industry standards."

In fact, Rolled Alloys was one of the first metal suppliers to achieve ISO 9001:2000 certification and are pleased to be able to offer aerospace approvals AS9000 certified, GEAE (General Electric Aircraft Engine) approved, Rolls Royce approved, and Pratt & Whitney LCS approved materials.

High-quality products are essential but Rolled Alloys takes it one step further. "We are committed to technology here at Rolled Alloys." Mr Reinke adds. "We are a technically focused organization with a staff of engineers who provide our customers with technical expertise in a broad range of applications. We pride ourselves in our ability to provide advice to all areas of the supply chain, and our ability to help solve customer's performance problems with metals. We have in-house facilities to perform material evaluations, including metallographic testing and corrosion testing."

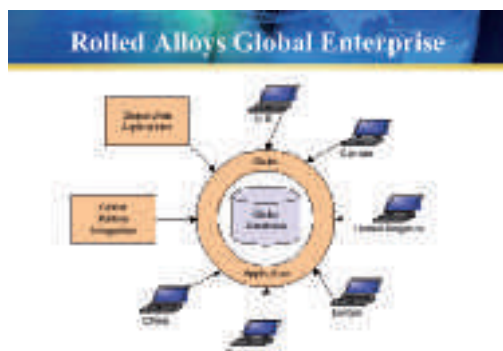
Rolled Alloys also boasts extensive processing capabilities. Together with its large stock of high-alloy materials, the company is able to provide prompt shipment of stock size material and custom cut parts. The company's processing capabilities encompass complete cutting and processing services including laser cutting, water jet cutting, plasma burning, shearing, gauling, rod coil levelling, sheet levelling, and saw cutting.

CUSTOMER FOCUS

Rolled Alloys commitment to providing a seamless service to its customers is reflected in the ease with which customers around the world can communicate with the company. "In addition to our international locations, we now have a multi-lingual customer service centre in Breda, the Netherlands, which services our sales operations in Europe. Customers from all over Europe can place orders with us in their own language."

Furthermore, as Dr Nichol explains, the company has invested in developing a software system to improve in-house efficiency and faster delivery times as well as online services available 24 hours a day, from anywhere in the world. "The idea is that our customer service centres can directly access in real-time our inventories in England and the US, making it possible to give customers anywhere in the world immediate quotations. Many of our customers enjoy the ability to do job estimating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week."

The concept of inventory control dates back 20 years, but the linking of the various countries to the US and United Kingdom inventory has been active since 2003. We can communicate our inventory and price situation to the customer regardless of where they are located in the world. Time differences are minimized with this system. The system was developed as a customer service to give us a faster response time. Our commitment to inventory and processing is critical. We are developing electronically linked global strategic inventories with the ultimate aim of being able to electronically exchange information between our customers, our producers, and ourselves. In fact we're already doing this with a couple of customers and suppliers. Forecast orders, production changes in orders, invoices, certifications; these time consuming tasks which are usually done manually are now done over the internet. We have developed this technology for our customers and suppliers, making it easier to do business with us. Suppliers and customers can electronically exchange information



Rolled Alloys has considerable stock capacity world-wide.

such as test certificates and invoices, and obtain copies of documentation from our website www.rolledalloys.com" he explains enthusiastically. The website also has a live chat feature for customers wanting additional information.

Rolled Alloys is strongly focused on making in-house processes more efficient, then extending this efficiency to their customers and suppliers. "Orders entered by our purchasing department enter the producer's system directly without them having to do order entry. Customers can access information about their orders immediately, online, instead of having to make a call" Dr. Nichol continues.

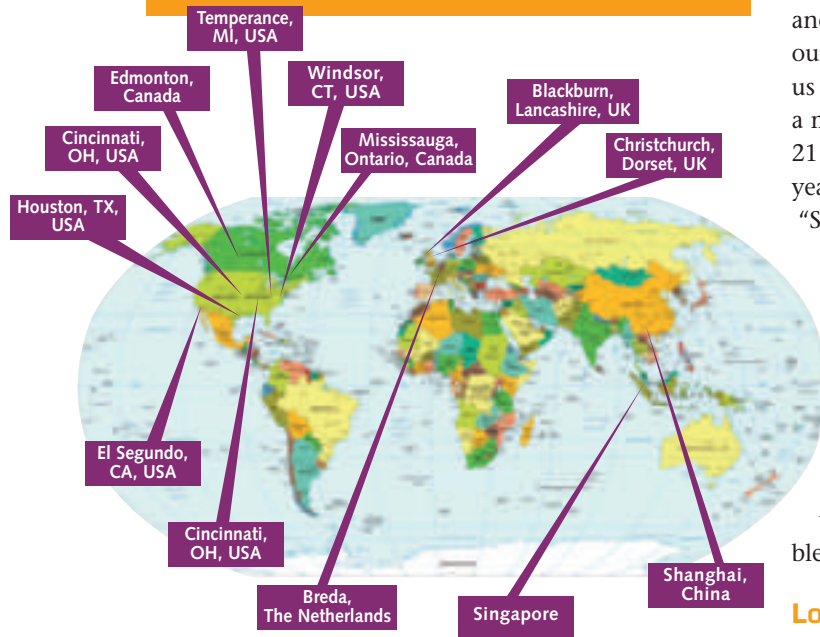
Interestingly, the customer service system was designed by the users, not by the systems department, to ensure that it meets users' needs. "We'll keep investing in the system and website, including making it multi-lingual for ease of use." Another service provided through the company's website is an extensive technical library which is now the most frequently visited part of the website. Rolled Alloys has long been known for its practical, metallurgical expertise.

SERVING THE INDUSTRY

Rolled Alloys has three main types of business: transactional business for which there is no advance planning, standard long term agreements, primarily in the aerospace market segment and one time, multi million dollar projects. As Mr. Reinke explains: "Our roots are in the thermal process industry where our customers need same day or next day service as they respond to their customer base which is focused on rush maintenance requirements in the heat treat, automotive or steel processing business. It is this transactional business that required Rolled Alloys to develop systems that can provide a fast response time and service." Mr. Reinke continues, "The aerospace business functions differently from the thermal process business with long term agreements being the norm. These agreements generally require a regular monthly or weekly shipment based on forecasts. This type of business is changing from a stock size product business where the fabricator does the pre-assembly processing of the product to one

Education and training

Rolled Alloys believes that education and training are paramount. Regular lunch and learn events are organised by the company, both for its customers, but also for its own staff. Additionally, Rolled Alloys works together with a number of local universities to provide work experience opportunities for up and coming talents. Rolled Alloys believes in careers and not just jobs. The company's dedicated and experienced staff is the result.



where Rolled Alloys is supplying cut to size pieces to the fabricator. This allows the fabricator to focus on their core competency, which is generally design, assembly and welding of components. For example, we have one customer in the aerospace business that used to buy random length bar products, then cut them and do a machining step before the product entered the final processing step. This required the customer to carry non-essential inventory and to absorb significant material scrap costs. Today, Rolled Alloys supplies 16,000 pieces a week directly to the customers' processing centre. We provide items in four different alloys and with three different diameters, package them in boxes and deliver them directly to the manufacturing site. This move to providing cut parts has been made possible because of the strength of our computer systems which allow us to keep track of thousands of parts with different dimensions."

Rolled Alloys also supplies multi million dollar, turn-key projects primarily to the oil and gas or petrochemical industry. They have a sourcing staff that can find products globally and a sales staff that can put these large projects together where Rolled Alloys acts as a sole supplier to major engineering and construction companies. Dr. Nichol explains, "In these diverse businesses and markets, Rolled Alloys can offer its customers expertise and a broad range of skills. We have developed our customer/supplier partnerships, and very importantly we

have strong relationships with our global suppliers. We buy inventory on a regular basis and most importantly we pay our bills on agreed upon terms. Our financial strength is important to the suppliers and our customers. We are in this business for the long term. Without those strong supplier relationships we wouldn't have anything to sell to our customers."

DEDICATED PERSONNEL

People remain at the heart of the Rolled Alloys' story and this is reflected in the loyalty of the team. "One of our employees will celebrate her 50th anniversary with us in January. Recently we had a retirement dinner for a man who had been with us for 39 years - there were 21 of us at dinner and between us we represented 515 years of experience!" says Dr Nichol with great pride. "Since our start in 1953, I'm only the fourth president in that time. We have very stable management compared to the rest of the industry, a strong work ethic and a committed staff. We like to say that we are large enough to cope and small enough to care. Everything we do is about trying to make a better product and to serve our customers better. We are a customer-focused business. We really care about building relationships with our customers, helping them to solve their problems and meet their needs."

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE...

In the coming years the Rolled Alloy team expects to follow its customers to other areas of the world such as India, investing in strategic inventories and personnel. Further expansion is also planned in northern Spain and Eastern Europe. "Once our Chinese operation is well established, we will need another inventory location in Asia, perhaps in Singapore. Our vision is to have North America, Asia and Europe all linked electronically so that inventories can be moved to wherever they are needed," adds Dr. Nichol. ■

Facts & Figures

Company name: Rolled Alloys

Established in: 1953

Locations: Temperance, Windsor, Cincinnati, Houston, El Segundo (USA); Mississauga and Edmonton (Canada); Blackburn and Christchurch (UK); Breda (The Netherlands); Singapore, Shanghai (China).

Key markets: Aerospace/aircraft, heat treatment, thermal processing, chemical processing, power generation, pollution control, waste incineration, pulp and paper, food processing, pharmaceuticals.

Products: Plate, sheet, bar, pipe, fittings, and welding materials are maintained in heat resistant, corrosion resistant, and high temperature alloys.

Services: Laser cutting, water jet cutting, plasma burning, shearing, gauering, rod coil levelling, sheet levelling, saw cutting.

CNC machining, Virtek Laser QC.