

HARALD PIHL: At the top of their



Becoming Formula-1 suppliers, having a paperless office and opening a new office in China are among the latest achievements of HARALD PIHL, the ever-growing supplier of special metals. While reliability, quality and speedy delivery have always been their focus, in recent years they have also zoomed in on innovation, change, flexibility, compassion and inclusiveness. Stainless Steel World spoke to Managing Director Jonas Pihl about how the company achieved all this in just a few years' time.

By Joanne McIntyre & Ineke Cooper

HARALD PIHL is an international family-run business located near Stockholm, Sweden, that was founded in 1912 and is still being run by third and fourth generations of the Pihl family. They are

known to distribute the largest range of nickel, titanium and copper alloys in Europe and pride themselves on their fast delivery system and rapid response.

Local and international expansion
HARALD PIHL already stocks a very wide range of products, from special alloys to wire and welding materials, to stainless steel small diameter tubes.

game



And now they have added another 20 percent of stock to their range. Jonas explains: “We are constantly expanding our stock. Last year we added even more alloys and with new specifications to our stock to widen our range, so we can serve our customers even better. We are adding more nuances of alloys, so for example where we had Titanium Grade 5 AMS, we now also have Grade 5 ASTM. We are also deepening our product range with greater volumes in stock.” Another area in which the company is flourishing is the waterjet cutting business (see box). The company’s

high-quality delivery means HARALD PIHL has attracted so much demand that they are now acquiring a second waterjet cutting machine. As a result of this and the additional stocking levels, HARALD PIHL is now planning to expand their premises and will start building works in April. In addition to expanding its premises in Sweden, as an international enterprise they have also grown geographically. They now have ten offices worldwide, with China being the latest addition. “The China office opened in September and this has enabled us to reach new customers which we would not have been able to reach otherwise. We are keen to expand and enter new markets. China is a new, exciting and growing market for us, and opening this office is definitely a positive development.”

Focus on quality

Quality is one of the pillars of HARALD PIHL’s success and it has continued to improve in this area. As a result, the company has attracted customers in the demanding Formula 1 and aerospace industries. “We were already in a very good position when it comes to quality, but we set the bar high and want to be the industry leader. We are always aiming for more, in all aspects of the business”, says Jonas. Three years

ago the company employed a very experienced quality manager who in turn took on a quality assistant from the University of Belgrade. Jonas explains: “Together they have dramatically raised the level of our quality both internally and externally, enabling us to acquire new customers that were out of reach before. These improvements have been made in the broadest sense of the word. We aim to optimize all of our processes to reach the highest standard possible, including the delivery process, traceability, identification, paperwork, everything.”

Improved online systems

One important area HARALD PIHL is always looking to improve is their online presence and ordering systems. Their accessible website is very clear with a good overview of what’s on offer and customers can easily find what they need online. HARALD PIHL

has an unusually transparent system in place, where the customer can see online exactly what is in stock. This is very beneficial for the customers as they know immediately what stock is available and when new stock will arrive, saving them precious time. Jonas explains: “A huge improvement that we made to the website is that customers can now see the progress of their orders, when it’s ready





Harald Pihl is able to rapidly supply any quantity of product from their huge stock near Stockholm, Sweden.

to be packed, collected or shipped. Customers can also download invoices, see if they have invoices that are due to be paid, and also download product certificates. Furthermore, repeat orders can be made with the simple click of a button.”

Internally this platform is also used for delivery monitoring. “We are usually keeping track of up to 250 incoming shipments, so what we’ve done now is set up a system which automatically provides us with information regarding the delivery

status. Everyone in the company can monitor these pending deliveries, making us even more efficient and transparent. The result is that we can all very clearly communicate about the deliveries to our customers.”

Paperless office

“There has been a decade of talking about paperless offices, but no one has ever seen one,” jokes Jonas. Yet HARALD PIHL is aiming to be completely paperless by the summer of 2018. About a year ago the company

started the project of digitalization and they have made huge progress since. Jonas confesses “We are about to reach our target of being a paperless office which will put us quite ahead of the game. And that is something we are very proud of.”

Innovation and modernization

It is not only in their online presence and digitalization that make HARALD PIHL a forward looking company; they have changed and innovated in other areas of the company as

Donations to Unicef

HARALD PIHL donates a portion of their sales to UNICEF by buying bags of nut cream for malnourished children. Nut cream is a highly calorific nut paste, enriched with vitamins, minerals and milk powder. Just three bags of nut cream a day can save a malnourished child’s life. UNICEF distributes the nut cream to malnourished children where necessary; at the moment this happens for example in Syria, Central African Republic and South-Sudan.

During 2017 HARALD PIHL donated 46,900 bags of nut cream to UNICEF, saving the lives of many children. By February 2018 the company had donated over 60,000 bags of nut cream, and this amount is growing with every customer order. This initiative means all customers, suppliers and partners are indirectly supporting children in need.



Staffan Trotzig and Roni Kaya, Harald Pihl sales representatives.

well. The company now has a much stronger focus on modernization and innovation. “Ten years ago we were less flexible; what happens today was the same as what was done yesterday. Now however, everyone here is very motivated to make changes and improvements. We pride ourselves to being a modern, innovative company that constantly strives to be prepared for the challenges of tomorrow.” In order to do that HARALD PIHL has chosen a different and innovative way to hire new people. “We told everybody we work with that if you find a good person out there who you think is suitable to work with us, give them a call. We want to create

group of people we have a very short decision making time; if we hear a good idea from anyone we can make it happen very quickly. We give people a lot of responsibility and I think that is a very important way to make people feel valued and be passionate about their work.”

Compassionate business

The company’s employees are also directly involved when it comes to being a compassionate business. Jonas explains: “We have an internal discussion about the best choice versus the right choice. The *best* choice reflects the hard values like delivery, quality, packing, marketing,

and we have an open discussion about all sorts of issues that could come up on the work floor. We want to be a good employer. These issues have been very high on the agenda in the past few years and we are dedicated to being a modern and inclusive company.”

HARALD PIHL has not only focussed on being a good employer, they have also reached out to the wider community by supporting local projects and UNICEF. “For every order someone places with us we make a donation to UNICEF (see box). The more you buy, the more you contribute. As a customer you can see directly the total donations your orders have delivered.”

Jonas adds “We aim to look to the future, it is not about always making as much money as possible but also about contributing to a wider goal. This way of working has a motivating and stimulating effect on us as a company and it benefits everyone; our customers, our suppliers, our business, our employees and the wider community.”

“Innovation & improvement is in our DNA”

a good atmosphere at the workplace so people enjoy working here and deliver work of a high standard. That has resulted in good, top-quality people actually coming to us.”

Much of the success of the company is therefore due to the people that work at its heart. There are now fifty people working in all the offices combined. “Since everyone in the company knows we are focusing on being a modern company with innovative ideas we get great suggestions. We have very open discussions about improvement and doing business in a compassionate way. Because we are a small, tight knit

things everyone is trying to be good at. We are aiming to be the best in the hard values. The *right* choice reflects the soft values, like how to support the environment, how you treat other people, what kind of company values you have. So if two companies offer the same standard in the hard values, you should look at their soft values to make a choice.”

HARALD PIHL has been working on their soft values for several years. “We look at workplace diversity and equal opportunities for everyone. We have people working with us from many different ethnic backgrounds

Facts & figures

Name: Harald Pihl
 Founded: 1912
 Employees: 50
 Products: Nickel alloys, titanium, welding materials, copper alloys, stainless steel
 Website: www.haraldpihl.com

Waterjet cutting

Five years ago HARALD PIHL started offering waterjet cutting as a service to their customers. Waterjet cutting is preferred for materials that are sensitive to the high temperatures generated by other cutting methods. It is also an environmentally friendly method with high cutting-accuracy. The high standard of quality and fast delivery HARALD PIHL is known for has made waterjet cutting a great success for them; it now makes up around ten per cent of the business and is their fastest growing component. Jonas explains: “Two years ago we employed a dedicated waterjet cutting team for the machine and the results have been fantastic. I gave the team full responsibility and a mission to double the figures in three years, they have done it in two. Our waterjet cutting team’s biggest ambition is to be best at what they do by combining high accuracy with high efficiency to give our customers the best possible service.”

