



Paul Meijering: focusing on quality and relationships ensures success

When Paul Meijering opened his stainless steel and speciality alloy supply business over thirty years ago, he had a clear strategy of doing what “felt right”. His singular focus on quality and customer service has seen the company flourish and grow year-on-year. Significant investments in new warehousing, systems and machinery allow the company to expand its customer base and the quantity of stock it offers.

By Joanne McIntyre

With over three decades of experience in the business, Paul is a well-known figure in the world of stainless steel distribution. With a quick smile and a seemingly endless list of anecdotes, he has always blazed his own trail in the world of supply and distribution. “We’re a little different than other suppliers,” he explains. “I never look at what others are doing and have always followed my own vision.” Today, his company sends stainless

and other corrosion resistant alloy tubes, pipes and fittings around the world from the company’s base in the Netherlands. With more than 11,000 articles on offer in ten different grades, the company continues to invest in technology, equipment and staff to provide a top-quality service.

Expansion of stock and services
While we walked through the spotlessly clean and orderly facilities

in Zaltbommel, the Netherlands, Paul talked about the distribution market and some of the changes that have occurred over the past few tumultuous years. Throughout it all, he has steered a steady course, and in fact, in the past two years, the company has had its highest-ever turnover. “The first significant change is that we’ve significantly increased overall stocking levels across the company. For example, last year, we doubled



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over 30 years, we've supplied directly to stockists. When they place an order, we can transport it directly to their customers. The orders arrive in unmarked trucks with our customer's name on the packing list."

Paul understands the business inside-out and has long believed that close communication with customers is the key to success. "If there is ever an issue with an order, we first solve the problem, then talk about what went wrong. I never want to have dissatisfied customers."

Another notable factor is Paul's insistence that every order must be dispatched on the day it arrives. "I've followed this practice of clearing the inbox by the end of the day for thirty years. Clients are often amazed that if they place an order at 16:30, it will be delivered the following morning

at 06:30. However, we can easily do this and still be home by 17:00. It's a question of good organisation and investing in state-of-the-art technology."

When a large order arrives, the customer is immediately called to determine which items are needed first. Urgent items are delivered immediately, while the rest is sent just in time for the customer to use. "Our customers appreciate this attention to detail which saves them time and stream-lines their receiving processes."

Investments in technology & people

Walking through the company's spacious warehouses, one can't help but notice the air of calm professionalism. Despite having a busy daily list of orders to fill, the staff are relaxed

the number of hollow bars we stock and, as a result, have accelerated growth in this sector. I believe you need to be bold when buying stock. This philosophy has seen us double our turnover within two years."

"Our customer base also continues to expand. We've met new customers and experienced increased orders from existing customers. For example, we supply the largest stockist in the UK, and that business is growing rapidly. It may surprise some people that we sell a lot more to the UK now than we did pre-Brexit. Customers in the UK appreciate that we always quote a price for the complete order. That differentiates us from other suppliers."

Supplying to stockists

Most of Paul Meijering's business is supplying stockists worldwide. "For



The sheet laser cutter provides value-added components for customers as needed.



Paul has made significant investments over the past two years, including a warehouse expansion to cater for his burgeoning cut-to-length tube business.

and focused. Ongoing investments in facilities and technology mean the workplaces are ergonomic, and orders are filled with minimal fuss. Automatic order-picking machines quietly assemble individual items into complete batches, ready for packing and dispatch. Overhead cranes gently cradle bundles of pipes as they are moved from the laser cutters to the packing station, and then on to waiting trucks.

Paul has made significant investments over the past two years, including a warehouse expansion to cater for his burgeoning cut-to-length tube business. “We opened the new warehouse space three months ago. It’s fitted with a storage and picking system which automatically moves pipes into the sawing department. Cut-to-length pieces have become a significant part of our business,” he explains.

The purchase of the new tube laser cutter has enabled the company to increase both turnover and quality for this popular service. “As tubes and fittings are our core business, it’s important to have the latest technology to ensure top-quality products. I believe it’s a good idea to have more room than we currently need, so the facilities are very generously proportioned.”

Two new picking machines were recently installed in the main warehouse to handle increased demand. A new forming machine will soon be accompanied by a co-bot, a simple robot that will take over cutting tasks.

As turnover has increased, more staff have been recruited, and today the company has 67 full-time employees. The company’s excellent reputation in the area means they have no trouble filling vacancies.

Paul has also invested in his fleet of trucks, with four new vehicles added in the past two years. “My father always said: when times are good, you should invest in the company. Over the past year, we’ve certainly followed that advice and invested a great deal!”

Building relationships

Paul’s business is based on strong relationships. His first order was from a former colleague over thirty years ago. He enjoys telling the story from a time

when fax machines were still in vogue, and the euro had not yet replaced the Dutch guilder.

“My friend called and said, ‘Paul, I’ve contacted several suppliers to order our year’s supply of stainless products... but I don’t want to work with any of them!’ I knew the products and quality he required, so I agreed to supply the order for the same price he’s been quoted. Within one minute, I received a faxed confirmation for a 300,000 guilders (EUR 157,000) order! Since that moment, they’ve exclusively bought from us. It was a great way to start a business,” he smiles.

Paul sources products from all over the world as long as they meet his strict quality standards. “When we are interested in a new producer, we visit their plant to see what they are making. Our first question is, what do you produce yourself? Successful visits lead to long-term relationships with our suppliers, all of whom we know personally.”

The original green choice

When our talk turns to the issue of ‘green’ steel in today’s market, Paul smiles. “Over 90% of the material content of the stainless steel we supply is produced from scrap. Stainless steel has always been a great example of a circular economy. Every piece will eventually be remelted and used to produce new material.”

The company has always been concerned with environmental issues. The cardboard boxes used to ship small items are recycled from a local company; Paul has no problem using



A storage and picking system in the new warehouse space automatically moves pipes into the sawing department to be cut.

boxes marked with other logos. Wooden crates that arrive filled with items are carefully stacked for reuse, and those that are damaged are shredded and then recycled. Plastic ties used to bundle pipes together are made from 100% recycled plastic. Both locations feature LED lighting, and the Bossekamp location has 1,056 solar panels on its roof. All company vehicles are electric or run on sustainable HVO 100 diesel, as does the company's modern fleet of trucks.

Commitment to quality

While 2022 was a record year for the Paul Meijering team, the market in 2023 is also strong. "We don't aggressively chase customers or projects. If they tell us, "I can get this order cheaper at a colleague", I tell them good luck, and we'll see you soon! Our commitment to quality goes far beyond the product certificates; we take care of every link in the supply chain."

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 and 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. Then they are whisked away on an automatic tube stacker to one of the 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



Paul's bold stocking strategy has seen the company double its turnover within two years.

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, 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. "We are one of the few suppliers to own a fleet of trucks, and as all of the truck drivers are on our payroll, they know how to treat the product," explains Paul. "Transport companies don't have expertise in handling stainless products and do everything

with forklifts. In my opinion, forklifts are only good for damaging orders! You need an overhead crane to correctly load stainless steel products."

Further automation planned

Paul has big future plans, including fully automating ordering and cutting systems to get orders dispatched even faster. "We're already very advanced with our level of digitalisation, and it's an area I will continue to invest in. Our laser cutters are a good example; we simply input the drawings, and the system immediately calculates a price for the customer. Embracing technology allows us to provide top-quality products for our customers in a timely and efficient manner. It's all about keeping our customers happy, no matter where they may be located and how big – or small! – their orders may be," he concludes with his characteristic smile. ▲

Facts & Figures

Paul Meijering...

- Stocks ten grades of stainless steel and special alloys.
- Stocks of 11,000 articles, such as pipes, tubes, sheets, flanges, fittings and components.
- Exports to over fifty countries daily.
- Ships 99% of all orders on the same day.
- Is certified to re-mark tubes using soft, hard and laser markings.
- Has laser cutters to produce ready-to-install components.
- Established in 1989, currently 67 employees.

Website: www.paulmeijering.nl/en/

