



ELECTRIC AVENUE

EQUIPMENT • IT HAS BEEN A DIFFICULT YEAR FOR EVERYONE IN THE INDUSTRY. HCB SPOKE TO BIP PEROLO FOR SOME INSIGHTS INTO HOW THE COMPANY HAS MANAGED THE DISRUPTION

THIERRY BOURGIGNON, CEO of tank equipment specialist BIP Perolo, spoke recently to HCB about his experiences over the past year and the changes that have had to be made to operations to continue to prosper during the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. He also brought us up to speed with what has been going on since we last spoke to him in October 2020.

HCB: How has business changed during the pandemic? Have you struggled to continue manufacturing, or had to introduce changes into the process?

TB: When Covid struck, it first affected China and there were of course consequences for our Chinese subsidiary in Rudong. However, luckily this coincided with Chinese New Year so during the holiday period our Rudong

team could take the necessary measures to develop adequate health and safety protocols.

Afterwards, when the pandemic struck Europe, we had to close our French headquarters for three weeks to implement health and safety procedures and also to source protective equipment such as masks. It was really heart-warming to see all the supportive messages from customers around the world flooding in. We had the new protocol validated by the local French authorities and reopened quickly thanks to tremendous effort by our employees who adapted quickly to the new situation.

Of course, only our production unit was closed during these three weeks, all other office-based jobs were done remotely. Luckily, with all our subsidiaries and agents we already had all the remote tools and organisation in place to make this transition period go smoothly.

HCB: How are you keeping in touch with your customers?

TB: We have the big advantage at BIP Perolo, in that we are a global player and have local representatives. Although international travel is limited, our sales managers and distributors still can travel in their respective countries or continents (e.g. Europe) without too much difficulty and as such keep the contact with the customer alive.

Furthermore, we also developed communication on social media such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube so that we can get direct customer contact. Obviously all exhibitions, so far, have been cancelled. Sadly, also the Transport Logistic show in Munich has gone and with that our traditional wine tasting, but we are looking into a fun way to replace this, which we will elaborate on soon.

HCB: How are you getting your products out there to the market?

TB: We still use the traditional ways of calling customers and do either a physical or virtual presentation of our products and novelties. Apart from that, we developed a newsletter to keep everybody informed of Perolo

innovations. Furthermore, we mainly use LinkedIn and our YouTube account to have short informative videos of our products showing them in action, or how their testing goes, etc. So the fact that all exhibitions are cancelled made us accelerate our digital communication.

HCB: Indeed, you mentioned last time we spoke that you were using digital communication more. Has that been successful? Have you had to re-think the way you go about your business from the commercial perspective?

TB: Yes, we received a lot of positive feedback on our new website. Also, the posts we do on social media are appreciated by our customers and allow them to interact even more with our company. We also try to publish video footage of valves in action or them being tested so the customer can get an inside look.

We recently launched a 'Meet the team' series, portraying Perolo employees from all subsidiaries so that our followers can meet the people behind the brand. We will also start in February/March with maintenance videos of our valve range so that repair facilities can have precise instructions of how to replace certain parts of our valves. Of course, digital communication will never replace physical travel and face-to-face meetings with customers, but it is a nice addition to already existing communication channels.

HCB: Have you had to hire people with new skills, or have you managed to re-train existing personnel to work under this different environment?

O THIERRY BOURGIGNON, CEO OF BIP PEROLO, ADMITS THAT 2020 WAS A DIFFICULT YEAR BUT NOTES THAT INVESTMENT OVER RECENT YEARS HAS SHOWN ITS VALUE AND THE COMPANY NOW HAS A FULL ORDERBOOK GOING INTO 2021

TB: Covid clearly accelerated the digital transformation of our company. From a general perspective, all teams adopted a digital way of working that is fully customer-orientated.

We recruited new people in our engineering department to accelerate the planned innovations and to bring in new ideas. Other departments when they put in place new procedures always respect a digital methodology nowadays and that is the case for all subsidiaries of our group.

Of course, for the digital communication it is more difficult. After all, we are in a very specific industry that is highly regulated and requires very precise communication. Therefore, we preferred to promote an employee who has been with us for nine years and who knows the products and the customers very well. Of course, this meant offering training in communication but at BIP Perolo we find it very important to have employees grow and to offer them new challenges when possible. We are also working with external partners for some specific subjects as advertising or website architecture, but most of the work is done in-house. This way we ensure a quick and qualified reaction to customer enquiries and needs.

HCB: When you look back at 2020, was it an outright disaster or did you manage to maintain the activity levels of the previous years?

TB: Well, it is a nuanced reply. On the one hand, it cannot be denied that 2020 was a difficult year, especially when we had to shut down the production unit in France. Sadly, we had to put production staff on furlough at the time to have the new health and safety protocol approved.

Next, the tank container market was severely hit by both reduced demand and Covid-19 with a number of new built tanks dropping to an all-time low. On the other hand, 2020 was also a time in which all the investments we made in the previous years with training and innovations and widening our product range finally paid off. We are proud to say that we did not have to let go

one single employee in the company and that at the end of 2020 our orderbook was full.

HCB: What is your outlook for 2021? Are you optimistic about the future of the market?

TB: The 2021 orderbook is full and we are currently recruiting new employees in different departments such as engineering, purchasing and production. As we saw in 2020 that all previous investments started to pay off, we are continuing our investment strategy by acquiring new state-of-the-art technology that will streamline our production process. We are also working on several innovations which we will communicate in due time.

Of course, Covid-19 will probably last for some time, but most of the companies that we work with seem to have adapted rather well and are confident in the future. From a global point of view, we can clearly see an ecological trend where tank containers and multimodal transport are getting more and more attention. So for us, the future looks bright.

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