

CBE's anti-crisis remedies

Bruno Conci, director of the Trentino-based company CBE, describes its program to innovate and renew its offer and combat the sector's crisis



Like all manufacturers of components for original equipment, CBE also suffers declining sales in such things as caravans and motorhomes for national and international markets. The company, which specialises in providing electronic equipment, control panels and wiring harnesses, has adopted strategies to reverse the drop in demand.

CBE's owner, Bruno Conci, claims that the number of his customers has increased, "But the total volume of the orders has dropped. We have decided, therefore, to evolve from mere product suppliers into suppliers of entire systems. This meant integrating the processes of design, development and manufacture of the wiring harnesses with those of our respective electronic equipment, prompting us, if the complexity of the entire system and the customer so require, to develop software and hardware systems that can be interfaced with the basic CBE systems".

Before the recession, CBE began to develop strategies to counter a possible drop in demand. Thus CBE has, among other measures, activated two more production sites enti-

rely dedicated to wiring harnesses and characterised by an extensive integration of the planning process. Whereas CBE had dedicated itself exclusively to the development of wiring harnesses that were then manufactured externally, nowadays all these phases are under CBE's direct control.

The time frames for the design, the realisation and delivery were thereby considerably shortened. Bruno Conci adds. "In this way we succeeded in minimising the probability of errors and we can plan the procurement of the necessary materials largely in advance. If the market shrinks while the players remain the same ones as before, it becomes all the more necessary to reduce waste and mistakes".

Given the numerically large product range of CBE's catalogue, and faced with static sales volumes, CBE must invest more in terms of quality. This takes into account that electronic products have a percentage of intrinsic defects, while suppliers are accustomed to consider volumes amounting to tens of thousands of units, whereas customers reason in terms of a few dozen units.

This is a major problem requiring increasingly large investments in automatic test equipment that can guarantee a high level of quality. Due to its different sales volumes, the market for recreational vehicles is very different from the automotive market. The sales and assistance networks of this sector are not able to equip themselves with advanced and expensive diagnostic and testing tools.

"Today the market increasingly requires a quality approaching that of the automotive sector," Conci adds, "but due to low production volumes it is very difficult to sustain the costs of the necessary research and development. The ability of CBE to face the current stagnation phase is the result of its past investments and the implementation of the correct business strategies consisting, for example, in the avoidance of excessive enlargements of its facilities even when sales were growing strongly and steadily, in focusing its efforts on its specific type of product category and on its advantages, and in re-investing profits within the company".

The number of expensive products installed on top-class vehicles is very small, so that

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 Caravan Salon Düsseldorf (DE) - 31.8 - 8.9.13
 Salone del Camper - Parma (IT) - 14.9 - 22.9.13



structure that CBE can vaunt.

"Quality for CBE", says Bruno Conci, "is not just about the product but also about what characterises the entire system: from the design to the procurement of components, to the realisation and to the final testing. This process also involves the computer system, whose management software, that had been in operation for 12 years, was replaced by a brand new system that also involves the plants where the wiring harnesses are manufactured. All this has led to a rationalisation of business processes and to an acceleration of the production processes involving mainly the procurement of materials, their control and the distribution of the finished product".



Bruno Conci, the patron of CBE

equipping this type of vehicles alone would not be remunerative. Products of the lower range generate the highest sales volumes while still requiring reliability, comprehensive functions and ease of use. This is made possible through the use of quality components and extensive testing, but also through the rationalised industrial organisation – from the designing phase to the sales and logistics

The management software employed is SAP Business One, which allows the integration of various procedures in one single system, leading to a considerable optimisation of the information flow. Thanks to this new system it is possible to track the process from the receipt of the commission to the delivery of the product to the customer, thus avoiding delays and potential problems which are difficult to manage while containing the impact of the continuing price rises of raw materials on the price of the finished product.



A new B2B site



With an extensive range of products for the aftermarket and for the original equipment of recreational vehicles and boats, CBE has decided to adopt tools of promotion, information and communication tailored to the needs of its various customers. To date, this distinction had been applied only to the printed catalogue, published in two versions

which contain not only different ranges of products, but also have a different approach in terms of their respective layouts and contents. But now this dichotomy has been applied to the web as well: through a new portal serving professional clients and focused on OEM components such as wirings, sockets and switches, switch-mode battery chargers and, above all, a wide range of control panels available in all possible pairing combinations with distribution boards and accessories.

The web site can be accessed through an introduction page at the address www.cbe.it, where it is possible to choose between the aftermarket division and the OEM division. Characterised by a neat and toned-down graphic layout and furnished with a wealth of illustrations, the site dedicated to the OEM division is available in Italian and English. The history, philosophy, staff and structure of the Group are presented in dedicated sections. There is also a dynamic section dedicated to news regarding CBE, its affiliates, the launch of new products and new initiatives. However, since the Trentino-based company's communication activities also comprise effective and creative advertising campaigns, the respective publications are collected in a dedicated section. Finally, a very useful feature of the website is the possibility to browse the product catalogue of the company in Italian, English and German.



Company Profile

With a history of more than 36 years, CBE is a leading company in Europe in the field of electrical and electronic systems for recreational vehicles and boats. Headquartered in Trento, Italy, CBE is a project partner of motor-home and caravan manufacturers around the world. CBE develops customised solutions for all aspects of on-board electrical systems, from control panels to distribution boards, from chargers to sensors, sockets, switches and even complete vehicle wirings. Quality, reliability and safety are constant features of CBE's operational dynamics. CBE has obtained UNI EN ISO 9001:2000 certification.