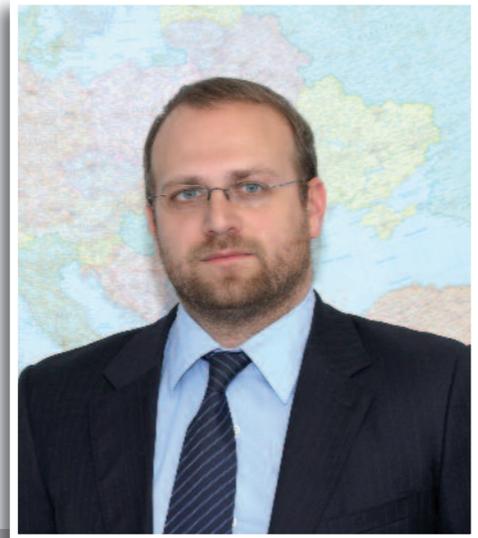


Let's hear from ... Paolo Moiola

Established over 37 years ago, CBE is one of Europe's leading suppliers of electrical and electronic equipment for caravanning and boating applications. Based in Trento, northern Italy, CBE is a project partner for motorhome and caravan manufacturers worldwide. The company provides a comprehensive range of electrical components (control panels, user interfaces, 12V distribution boxes, battery chargers, 230V distribution boxes, and tank level indicators), complementary accessories like switches, sockets of all kinds, frames and small test/control panels. But they also focus on wiring harnesses – not just for connecting up CBE devices but for the entire living compartment. We spoke to Paolo Moiola, CBE export sales manager



What does CBE specialize in, and what can you offer camper manufacturers?

Our customers are motorhome manufacturers producing from 20 to 5,000 vehicles a year. We have two types of service: standard and personalized. The standard service is for those with relatively low production volumes; it involves solutions suited to most motorhomes in production, with standard wiring to connect our devices together, all to the highest safety and efficiency standards. Specific requirements often arise for the components, for which we develop personalized designs by customizing the hardware or software of existing products or by devising new ones. As for the wiring harnesses, we realized that, to compete in this market, we had to supply a turnkey solution tailored to the customer's needs. Normally, we go to the customer and capture all their detailed requirements in situ: where the electrical devices are, what the installation's power ratings and demand are, etc. We can then design and supply made-to-measure wiring harnesses of exactly the right dimensions, ready to install, with suitable sections

to ensure that all the electrical devices receive the right power without voltage drops. If the customer can design the wiring themselves in-house, then we still aim to work with them as a partner, not merely a supplier. We arm ourselves with as much information as possible, to obtain a complete picture of the installations involved, enabling us to propose solutions of optimum effectiveness and value for money.

Why should a customer choose CBE as its system supplier? What is special about CBE?

With nearly 40 years' experience, CBE is the only player that has been operating in this sector for decades in all markets Europe-wide and beyond. We supply over two thirds of the premium vehicle manufacturers, and we are leaders in the medium-high bracket, too. With such a strong presence in the premium segment, we are ideally placed to introduce innovations, which then become available in the lower-cost price bands, as well. This is undoubtedly a valuable and genuinely unique selling point. We know

from experience how motorhome manufacturers think and operate, because we work with them directly, not through agents, distributors, or representatives. We understand the production arena and the market that our customers operate in, so we can offer designs that help to optimize the use of time and labor involved in fitting out a motorhome. And naturally, this translates into reduced costs. With the data, designs and developments that we have produced over the years for camper manufacturers all over the globe, we can offer simply unrivalled experience to our customers, large and small alike. We see ourselves as long-term partners; we are not interested in quick-and-dirty relationships with our customers based on cheap prices and short-termism. On the contrary, we prefer to develop a serious offering that reflects our standards and that provides a best fit between the materials and technologies available and the customer's budget. Through our extensive experience in this sector, we fully understand the context that our products fit in to: we know what a motorhome is made



CBE booth at Düsseldorf Caravan Salon 2013



CBE booth at Salone del Camper 2013

of, how it is built, and which problems arise during the manufacturing process; and we appreciate the after-sales and end-user needs.

How do you normally acquire a new customer? How do you present your offering and move the relationship forward?

In logistical terms, the wiring harness is the second most important component, after the chassis, that the manufacturer needs to take care of. Without the wiring, you cannot even start to build the motorhome. So you need a supplier that not only delivers on time but also operates to guaranteed high quality standards – for reworking the electrics in a finished motorhome is a long and costly business. That is why we are keenly aware of many manufacturers’ concerns and reluctance about changing supplier for this key component of any recreational vehicle. We normally start our relationship with a new customer by supplying standard components and cables. Later, when the customer has fully tested our products and appreciated their quality and reliability, we are called back to develop and supply the entire wiring system. Whether produced in-house or purchased from external suppliers, wiring harness is typically a substantial cost for a camper manufacturer, a cost that is hard to drive down. Indeed, calling on suppliers from the automotive or industrial-vehicles sectors is not an option, because our segment is too small and the delivery timeframes are too short. CBE, together with our affiliate companies, is one of the very few businesses anywhere in Europe that specialize in wiring for recreational vehicles. That’s why we have not only the experience but also a manufacturing system with the agility, promptness and flexibility to cater for large and small orders alike.

Which issues do you need to take into account when designing a motorhome wiring system?

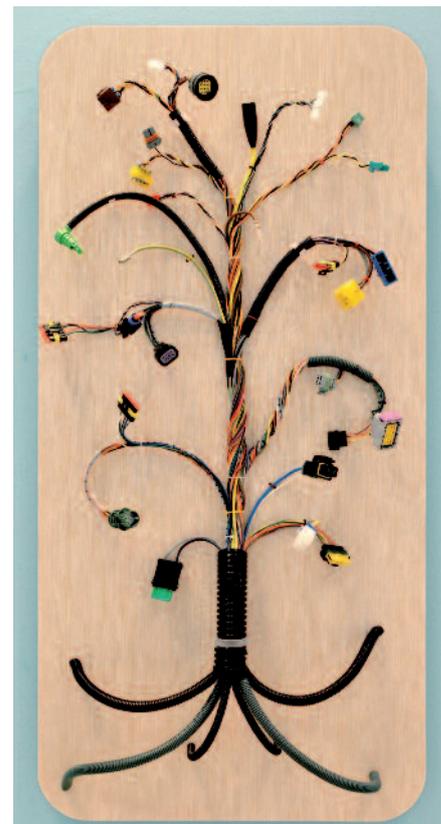
First, we need to get to know the customer and their manufacturing approach. It is important to visit their production department for our technicians to learn about the electrical devices installed, the construction technology used, and the cable routing. CBE normally adapts to the customer’s existing approach: clearly, we cannot expect them to build their motorhome around our wiring harness; rather, our wiring harness must fit into their system. Naturally, we try to suggest, for example, an arrangement that we believe would offer the best trade-off between efficiency (f.e. in terms of recharging the battery for the services when the vehicle is in motion) and reduced wiring costs. Indeed, if the equipment is some distance away, then you need longer, fatter cables, which tend to be more expensive.



Getting the right cable size is vital. We often find that not even our customers realize just how many meters of wiring their vehicles contain. In fact, an average motorhome has over 500 meters’ worth, but without optimization, this can even stretch to 800, and what a waste of money that is ...

Electronics are continually developing and evolving. What is your company doing to support your customers over the long term?

We have been in the business for nearly 40 years. Our components are used in over 250,000 motorhomes, counting jobs done since 2000 alone. That’s a huge number of vehicles with our equipment; and of course, by their very nature, the electronic components have not always been designed to last for decades. If we have kept going this long, there must be a good reason. We want our OEM customers to know that CBE is a partner that does not forget about its products once the customer has paid for them. We continue to support even our oldest products, through both technical advice and repairs. We believe that a motorhome manufacturer’s reputation depends partly on how it looks after used vehicles, and this effort is impossible without support from the OEM-component supplier. For us at CBE, after-sales support is vitally important; without a shadow of doubt, it is also one of our strengths. When we attend a trade fair, we are looking not only to meet people on a B2B level but also



to talk to the public. Although CBE does not sell direct to end users, and the after-market accounts for no more than 10% of our total revenue, we are keen to reach out to the public. We often find them an interesting source of ideas, along with the odd grumble, which all helps us refresh and refine our offering.

How important are people in CBE Group?

Like other OEM suppliers (such as those that build the mechanical core), we supply customers that are in competition with each other. It is important for our company to handle confidential information properly and to ensure that the person dealing with the customer is a skilled professional with deep knowledge of the sector and the ability to fully grasp each customer’s specific requirements. Those who represent CBE in dealings with our clients are operational staff; they are the company’s heart and soul. They are professionals who know the history of this industry, who see the whole picture, from the most economic vehicle model up to luxury maxi motorhomes costing 300,000 euros that have been (or will be) fitted with every system under the sun, for which every conceivable problem has already been anticipated and solved. In short, the CBE management team knows its business inside out, because they live and breathe caravanning and they have been working in CBE with dedication and skill for at least a decade.