



Italian style takes root in the USA

Renzo Kerkoc, CEO of Tecnoform, talks about the changes his company is undergoing in response to the dynamics of a society which itself is changing fast, both in Europe and America

Words Renato Antonini - photo Enrico Bona

In these challenging and complicated times, Tecnoform is working at many levels to create ever closer and more fruitful relationships with their clients. Renzo Kerkoc, CEO of Tecnoform, tells us how the company is responding to the needs of new users in this fast-changing world.

Aboutcamp BtoB: In an increasingly globalised world, does Tecnoform still consider Europe to be its principal market?

Renzo Kerkoc: For some years now Tecnoform has taken on the challenge of the global marketplace, while aware

of the persistent differences between the various macro-regions. We are an Italian company, deeply rooted in Europe, but we're also investing strongly in America. We started working with American companies in 2005, as a supplier for Winnebago, and our involvement in the market has accelerated since 2017, with the expansion of our operations, and with the foundation of Tecnoform Inc., our US subsidiary, in 2019. In the years since then we have grown very strongly in the American market, and our turnover has increased from 2.7 to almost 11 million USD.

Aboutcamp BtoB: How is your American branch set up?

Renzo Kerkoc: We started looking for a suitable factory location two years ago, and we are just completing the installation of our machinery now. For strategic reasons, we decided to set up in Grand Rapids, in West Michigan. The area has a number of high-quality office and home furniture companies, and so we can count on the availability of skilled labour and a well-structured supply chain. We are also close to the state of Indiana, where several of the largest RV manufacturers are based. Tecnoform Inc. will initially supply furnishings for the RV in-



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dustry, and we're also open to establishing relationships with the nautical and furniture sectors.

Aboutcamp BtoB: How is the American market different from Europe?

Renzo Kerkoc: In the United States, manufacturers are moving fast towards automation, and they are well-prepared for competing in the global marketplace. This has stimulated us to change as well: we are aiming to increase our production capacity and want to interface with other manufacturers, as well as employing innovative materials. It may at first seem that a few American RV makers are somewhat resistant to change and innovation. For instance, they may find it hard to change over from protruding to flush mounting door panels. However, the furnishing projects we have completed so far in the US have been a positive experience for our customers, and Tecnoform has been able to establish a distinct style for design and fabrication. Last year, we completed an important interior project with Jayco: the Terrain/Launch 4x4 model obtained the prestigious RV News 2022 Type B of the Year and RV Business 2022 Top RV Debut awards.

Aboutcamp BtoB: What does Tecnoform offer American makers?

Renzo Kerkoc: Our production department employs innovative machinery, and we also want to offer the American market the co-design and co-engineering experience that we have pioneered in Europe. The US plant will make flat panels first, followed by other components. Our objective is to penetrate the RV towable and fifth-wheel market, while building on our strengths in motorised RVs. As an example, we're already working and building great new projects with Winnebago, Forest River, and Thor groups. Together with our award-winning customers, we want to inject innovation into the RV industry, using new materials, new decorative elements, and construction systems that differ from the conventional approach and provide clear benefits to our customers and users.

Aboutcamp BtoB: Europe and America: what points of contact are there between them?

Renzo Kerkoc: I believe that research on both sides of the Atlantic will focus on light weight and sustainability. We must adapt our production increasingly towards the use of light-weight, sustainable materials. Lighter vehicles consume less fuel and have greater availability for the installation of battery packs. The issue of light weight is also a hot topic in the United States right now, especially for towables linked to electric vehicles.



Tecnoform USA

Tecnoform is expanding into the United States with new manufacturing, service, and sales operations in the Grand Rapids (MI) area. This new facility will serve as its North America headquarters, and will produce high quality, distinctively designed RV furniture, 'Made in the USA'. Tecnoform started working with American companies in 2005, but its involvement in the market has accelerated since 2017 with the expansion of the operations. In the years since then the company has grown very strongly in the American market, and the turnover has increased from 2.7 to almost 11 million USD.

NowoCore

NowoCore is a new material presented by Tecnoform at the 2022 Caravan Salon. It is used to make super-light-weight, water resistant doors. Made from recycled materials, it can be shaped to a unlimited variety of forms. NowoCore takes light-weight to new levels, with a view to future applications on electric vehicles. It is highly water resistant, making it ideal not only for bathrooms, kitchens and tables, but also for furniture which may be used outdoors as well as inside the vehicle.



Interview with RENZO KERKOC

Aboutcamp BtoB: But how can you reconcile production costs with light weight and sustainability?

Renzo Kerkoc: You have to look at the total cost of the product, which includes hidden costs incurred after the product leaves the factory. The higher cost of production may be compensated by lower downstream process costs. Just think of the costs of transport and handling, for example. We need to start thinking in terms of total cost and product lifecycle and circularity.

Aboutcamp BtoB: No doubt the issue of sustainability also affects the organisation of Tecnoform and its operations.

Renzo Kerkoc: Yes, the environment has been a central concern of Tecnoform for many years. We are working on two fronts: reducing our consumption and recycling. In 2014 we launched a programme to reduce our energy consumption, as attested by the Energy Audit Report (UNI CEI/TR 11428): Tecnoform was the first company in the Bologna area to implement such measures. To reduce our energy costs, we covered the roofs of our buildings with photovoltaic modules. Now we have started the second phase of our energy reduction programme, by installing a boiler fueled with wood processing waste, among other things.

Aboutcamp BtoB: Have you made investments in human resources?

Renzo Kerkoc: The company is undergoing a generational changeover: Tecnoform is evolving and employing an increasing number of young people. A number of our earliest team members have recently retired and the new entries are young people, whose cultural background makes them strongly interested in innovation and environmental sustainability. Tecnoform is increasingly connected with the values of the new generation, looking to the future. We have held several courses with universities and are working with leading trade schools, which I believe to be very important. And this “youthful” way of thinking is also at the heart of our new communications strategy.

Aboutcamp BtoB: And what form does this new way of communicating take?

Renzo Kerkoc: The company is radically changing the way it communicates with its clients. It all started during the most intense period of the pandemic, when we were forced to deal with restrictions on both travelling and meeting in person. We had to find new ways of communicating, and in 2020 we set up our Digital Event, which enabled the impactful exchange of information between Tecnoform and our clients.



The high-quality digital events are organised by specialists in digital communications and equipped with HD videocameras and other professional equipment. We set up a dedicated area in the company offices and host this on-line conference - to which all our clients are invited - annually, live streamed in five languages. Our managers present new products and answer questions about them. Each product is presented in full detail. Prior to the event, we send a customized proprietary Decor Box containing samples of our materials and decorative elements to each client. Individual clients are provided with their own personal slots, so that we can speak with them directly. The Digital Event is now in its third year, and we've upgraded it in a number of ways. Our communications language has also evolved: our videos are more interactive, showcase more details and give more information together with the high-quality images themselves.

Aboutcamp BtoB: So your communications are now all digital?

Renzo Kerkoc: No, not at all. Along with the Digital Event, we still consider our participation at the Düsseldorf Caravan Salon to be essential to our business. And there is also a third annual appointment, the Strategic Supplier Day: we bring all our principal suppliers together at our offices to review the current situation and discuss our plans for the future. This November's Strategic Supplier Day focusses on the subject of sustainability.



Strategic Supplier Day 2022