

by Rebecca D'Amico

Bixby Builds Success Through Strong Customer Relations

RD: What is the nature of your business?

RN: Bixby International is a custom sheet extruder focused on multi-layered sheet. Our product mix is such that some of our multi-layer structures enhance the architecture of composite sheet designs. Bixby is capable of extruding a broad spectrum of engineering polymer together with a multitude of fabrics, foams, films, and adhesives. That broad manufacturing experience allows us to select the right combination of polymers and materials to create the unique sheet solutions demanded by our customers. Our customer sheet solutions approach is supported with R&D and an Engineering team complete with rapid prototyping capabilities.

Ray Nippes
Vice President Sales &
Marketing
Bixby International
Corporation
Newburyport, MA
No. of Employees: 65 on
Three Shifts



RD: What is your company's background?

RN: Bixby is a 135-year old company, whose beginnings were in the footwear industry. Many of the products were multi-layered combining fabrics, resins, and adhesives. As times changed, Bixby adapted their process to extrusion and developed an expertise in combing and coating a wide variety of dissimilar materials with thermoplastics.

RD: How has it evolved from its beginnings?

RN: Early on, Bixby's primary process was based on coating techniques other than extrusion. As technology in polymer processing developed, Bixby evolved its processes to include extrusion to make up the multiple-layer products it had developed for the footwear industry. Leveraging extensive experience in manufacturing multi-layer products, Bixby focused on R&D and product development to create high-end polymer laminates for a multitude of end-use markets. We became involved in the composites industry through our experience in combining and achieving dependable adhesion with various fabrics and thermoplastics. For example, the need for a material to seal core in the VARTM process led us to develop and patent a proprietary laminate called COR-LOC. Bringing this knowledge of various materials' attributes into product development has allowed us to grow as a supplier to many other industries.

RD: How did you get started in the industry?

RN: I began my career in plastics in the polyester film and sheet arena. From that beginning, I became involved in a converting/distribution company. We sheeted and die cut a variety of different plastics. My next phase was operating a two-plant thermoforming company. Again, the focus was varied plastic materials depending on end-use functionality. My next opportunity came in the coating, laminating, and metallization area. This also brought my initial experience in extrusion. By this time I had become pretty much a materials person, so when the opportunity to join Bixby came, I jumped at it. The timing couldn't have been better. Bixby was in the initial stages of revamping its business plan and its approach to the industry. A major portion of our time is spent working with our clients in designing a materials solution for their problems. Composites offer just one of the potential solutions in Bixby's multi-layer products. It is still exciting, after all these years, to see the next generations of materials and to be able to work with them.

RD: What obstacles does your company face today in the regulatory or technical arenas?

RN: Bixby is proud of its commitment toward minimizing its impact on the

environment. We are careful to employ materials in our constructions that have no significant environmental, health or safety concerns and therefore regulatory issues have not posed an obstacle in doing business. Our biggest technical challenge comes from finding and developing new raw materials and resin compounds that can significantly change the functionality of a sheet laminate. Our customers are developing products that demand more abrasion resistance, toughness, tensile properties, aesthetics, anti-static or electrical properties UV resistance—you name it. The major resin suppliers have not been as aggressive over the last several years in developing truly new and unique polymers or product extensions, creating the challenge and opportunity for smaller companies like

ourselves to pick up the baton and develop unique alloys or material laminates, based on very different materials.

RD: What are your marketing efforts?

RN: We are not market driven. We develop customer relationships one at a time in a close partnership on product development programs with our prospective accounts. As we do this, our capabilities are learned both by our customers and our suppliers of resins, fabrics, adhesives, etc. Many of our best leads come to us through "word of mouth." Probably the biggest bang for our buck is to have prospective customers and suppliers visit us to see our unique capabilities and to work with us in developing the next generation products.

RD: What development or research would you like to see happen to improve the industry?

RN: I'd like to see a renewed focus on the core research necessary to achieve meaningful new product development on the resin suppliers' side. Attention needs to turn again to improving the functionality of the polymers versus reducing costs and gaining efficiencies. There are plenty of new ideas for innovative products out there but they cannot be realized until the plastics industry focuses harder on developing the new technologies to allow innovative growth. Today, I see more of the pressing problems being resolved down stream from the raw material suppliers. The large companies are unable to make development decisions quickly enough to be effective. Many of the most exciting, practical resin developments (in terms of performance) are coming from smaller materials compounders and creative converters.

RD: Where do you see your business in five years?

RN: Bixby is quite bullish on the polymer materials and composites sheet laminates business. We're projecting strong growth, doubling our sales in the next five years. Several of our developing programs in this area support that optimism. We cater to a very niche segment within the extrusion industry. Our focus is to provide thermoplastics-based multi-layer sheet solutions to manufacturers in many different industries. By growing application-by-application, we're somewhat unique and constrained only by our ability to manage more programs, which becomes a conscious decision on how we plan to invest our resources for the future. **CM**

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