

by Roxanne Fraver

UMECO Composites Moves Customers From Wet-Layup to Closed Molding



RF: What is the nature of your company?

AM: Our business manufactures and supplies a wide range of materials, products, and services to the compos-

ites industry worldwide. We pride ourselves on our high level of service and innovative range of products. These products include vacuum bagging materials, resins systems, pre-preg, and composite tooling. We specialize in creating value for our customers. For example our customized welded bagging systems, low temperature curing out of autoclave resins systems, and our service businesses, which can manage customers' inventory on a just-in time basis.

RF: How many employees do you have?

AM: We employ over 550 people located within seven business units. Approximately 20 percent of employees are based in North America and the rest in Europe.

RF: What is your company's background?

AM: UMECO Composites is one of three divisions of the UMECO plc group, which is based in England. UMECO was a diverse business until a new management team joined in 1997. The new team focused the group on the provision of value added services primarily to the aerospace industry and made the first steps into the composites market in 1999.

RF: How has it evolved from its beginnings?

AM: The composites business has grown significantly since the acquisition of Aerovac, based in England and France, in 1999. We subsequently acquired Richmond Aircraft Products based in Norwalk, CA, in 2000. Both businesses specialize in vacuum

bagging materials. It was last year, however, that we made a further significant step forward when we acquired Advanced Composites Group, which develops and manufactures resins systems and pre-pregs from its facilities in Tulsa, OK, and in England.

RF: How did you get started in the industry?

AM: I have an extensive technical background and have managed a number of engineering businesses including Dunlop,

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Serck, and Schlegel. My experience was mainly within the aerospace and automotive sectors. I joined UMECO in 1999 to manage their composites businesses.

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

AM: We don't face too many obstacles ourselves; however, we continue to strive to provide our customers with the very best products and services to help them deal with these challenges. For example we have developed and continue to evolve a range of materials designed for customers moving from wet lay-up to closed molding processes. Also, our range of low temperature out of autoclave cure resin systems use less energy during the curing process and therefore are more environmentally friendly.


RF: What are your marketing efforts?

AM: Each of our business streams promotes its own well-known brands through advertising and representation at industry shows including SAMPE, JEC, and airshows such as Farnborough. We also have a group website, www.umeco.com, which provides background information on all of our businesses and provides easy links to sites where customers can obtain more detailed information on each business and its product range.

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

AM: For many years now we have worked closely with industry and government organizations in the US and Europe to develop new materials, methods, and standards. All these efforts are focused on helping the industry and our customers to be more competitive in their market sectors.

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

AM: The composites industry has an exciting future. The use of composite materials is growing in key market sectors such as aerospace, wind energy, and marine. We also expect these materials to play an increasing role in the automotive and construction industries. Our strategy is to participate in the growth of the industry building upon our existing strengths and adding to them as necessary through acquisition. 

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