

by Rebecca D'Amico

Comtek Desires Leadership Role in Out-of-Autoclave Processing

CM: What is the nature of your business?

PW: Comtek Advanced Structures, a.k.a. Comtek, specializes in advanced composites applications for the international aerospace and defense market. For aircraft manufacturers and their top-tier suppliers, we design, test, qualify, certify, manufacture and support composite parts. We have a very active research and development program, which we believe will make us an industry leader in the manufacture of low cost composite parts, using out-of-autoclave processing. We are in the midst of a series of patent applications to protect our technology, which we are presently using to produce parts for the Airbus A380 aircraft. For airlines and other operators, we offer component repair services for structural and interior parts, including composite primary structure. Our main market is the regional airline industry, plus we repair parts for Boeing and Airbus aircraft, and for corporate jets. We also have a range of proprietary products that we have designed and developed—mainly floor panels—that we sell to airlines as replacement parts.

CM: How many employees do you have?

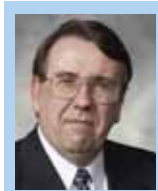
PW: Comtek has 70 employees at its facility in Burlington, Ontario, Canada and 30 employees at its Phoenix, Arizona facility. We are actively hiring at both locations.

CM: What is your company's background?

PW: We started in 1994 in Canada, with three employees and 2,000 square feet of office and shop space. With the increased use of composites in aircraft structure, there was a clear but unmet need for professional, engineering-based repair support. I recruited a colleague from Airbus, Alistair Davie, who is a recognized expert in aircraft composites, and we started the business together.

CM: How has it evolved from its beginnings?

PW: In 1996, we won our first manufacturing contract and the next year we moved into a purpose-built composites facility, which was doubled in size in 2000. In 2003, we made the decision to expand to Phoenix and opened our facility there in late 2004. Both facilities include a mix of repair and manufacturing work, although the Canadian location remains the R&D, technology development, and prototyping center. We recently took additional space in Burlington and so we now have 50,000 square feet there and 35,000 square feet in Phoenix. Comtek is now a diversified, international company with a strong technology focus. With the recovery of the airline industry, the resurgence in aircraft manufacturing and the continued strength of the defense industry, we see tremendous growth opportunities before us.



Patrick Whyte
President & CEO
Comtek Advanced
Structures
Phoenix, Arizona

CM: How did you get started in the industry?

PW: I'm an aerospace engineer and I've spent many years working in aircraft design, maintenance and modification for a number of well-known firms.

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

PW: In the technical area, we're looking for resin systems with good high-temperature performance for our resin infusion technology. As for regulation, our international customer base requires us to deal with a number of airworthiness authorities, mainly the FAA in the U.S., Transport Canada and the European agency, EASA. The harmonization of regulations between the U.S. and Canada is very good, but we continue to have problems with EASA in terms of cost, time and the ability to get our aftermarket products approved in Europe. EASA was supposed to be a more efficient and streamlined solution compared to dealing with the individual national airworthiness authorities in Europe, but in fact the situation has become worse, not better.


CM: What are your marketing efforts?

PW: Comtek has two direct sales teams—an Airline Sales team for repairs and aftermarket products, and an OEM Manufacturing Sales team for design-build manufacturing contracts and special projects. We have sales representation in Europe, and we are actively seeking sales representation in developing markets around the world. We believe that our new technology has application beyond aerospace and defense. We have identified a number of strategic partners in other industries, including building construction for example, and we are in the process of identifying potential partners in other sectors where composites are being increasingly utilized.

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

PW: We'd like to see a continued trend toward engineered parts fabricated with robust processes and high repeatability. We're now able to build aerospace-quality, highly-loaded structural parts without using an autoclave. Some customer education is needed for those who still believe that an autoclave is the only answer.

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

PW: We intend to grow rapidly into a technology-driven public company, specializing in the application of advanced composites and expanding into other industry sectors beyond aerospace and defense, with multiple locations internationally. 

Rebecca D'Amico is CM magazine's production & marketing coordinator: 703.525.0511; rdamico@acmanet.org.

Advertiser Review

SAY YOU SAW IT IN COMPOSITES MANUFACTURING MAGAZINE

Advertiser	Page#	Advertiser	Page#	Advertiser	Page#
Akzo Nobel Polymer Chemicals	back cover	Gerber Technology	49	Onsrud Cutter	55
Alcan Baltek	7	Flow International Corp.	37	Plascore	17
Ashland Distribution	19	Frees, Inc.	33	Propex Fabrics, Inc.	45
Axel Plastics Research Labs	Inside front cover	Gougeon Brothers, Inc.	14	Pro-Environmental, Inc.	39
Bedford Reinforced Plastics	63	GS Manufacturing	12	Reed City Tool & Die	59
CCP	5	Huber Engineered Materials	9	RS Technologies	39
CMR	50	IPS Weldon	27	TR Industries	53
Coastal Enterprises Company	25	ITW Plexus	3	Safas Corporation	43
Colbond	49	Lectra	51	Saertex	31
Composites News	67	Mektech Composites, Inc.	38	Ventilation Solutions	inside back cover
CVD Diamond	44	McClellan Anderson	63	Via Mare	52
DeComp Composites	16	NCC	32	Zyvax	23
E S Manufacturing	15	Net Composites	44		
Eurovac Corp.	16	Nida Core	13, 15, 17		