



Miles Platts begins new era!



THE MOULDSHOP: Precision technical mouldings totalling batches of between 5,000 to 100,000 per month

ELECTRICAL components giants Miles Platts has just made the seamless transition to its hi-tech premises in Blaby Industrial Park – marking the start of an exciting and innovative new phase for the globally-renowned firm.

The custom-designed, contemporary set-up at Unit Z, in Winchester Avenue, Blaby, is quite a change from the company's previous two-acre centre in Abbey Park Road, home to Miles Platts since 1978.

As every entrepreneur knows, change can be tough, but it's a necessary evil which managing director David Platts embraces with conviction.

Having just cut the ribbon and officially opened the new premises with his father and former managing director Brian Platts, David is looking to the future with equal measures of focus and optimism.

And with a dedicated, loyal workforce behind him, he has every reason to feel this way.

"We have 20 staff with more than 10 years' service and of those, eight have been with us for 25 years," says David. "We are lucky to have such loyal staff."

"When we were in the throes of planning the move, I had two rounds of one-to-one consultations with each of our 80 staff," says David. "They were all so positive about the firm and they didn't want to work anywhere else because they are happy working here."

"We only had three people leave and that was because they couldn't accommodate both child care and travel. We think it speaks volumes about the company that so few made that decision," says David.

In a fickle world, a dependable



NOW OFFICIALLY OPEN: (l-r) Brian and David Platts cut the ribbon at the new premises

staff is no mean feat, but it's likely that one of the reasons why David maintains such a strong rapport with his employees is his understanding of their various roles.

As a 16-year-old school leaver, David joined the firm as an apprentice and worked his way up through a number of departments, including tool making, injection moulding, quality control and sales.

The story begins 36 years ago, in 1971, when David's father, Brian, set up Miles Platts with

the late Terry Miles. Unearthing a unique market in the electrical and electronics industry, Brian and Terry, began the manufacture of standard electrical bobbins, offering a unique product range which captured the imagination of clients from all corners of the globe.

And if you doubt the necessity of electronic bobbins, rest assured that you have at least 25 in your home, lurking in your audio equipment, domestic appliances and elsewhere.



ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT TOOLROOM: European customers value and appreciate in-house design, engineering and production capabilities

A core component of a transformer, they control the voltage from the mains. In real terms, this stops your lap-top reaching melting point courtesy of 240 volts each time you plug it in.

The original Miles Platts bobbin began life inside every pre-pubescent lad's must-have toy – the Hornby train set. Since then, its fundamental design has hardly altered.

Just two years into production, the bobbin was already considered as the industry blueprint to which all manufacturers referred. Today, 60 million are produced by Miles Platts each year, mainly for the electronics, automotive and telecoms industries.

"Before the 1970s, there were no bobbin manufacturers in the UK," explains David. "Prior to this, companies such as GEC, Thorn Lighting and Brush at Loughborough would produce their own bobbins from Bakelite or cardboard, which were of very low quality and consistency," he adds.

"The introduction of our innovative designs and extensive ranges of standard components had a long lasting effect, not just in the UK, but in the world electronics industry as a whole."

"Our product allowed many British transformer manufacturers to evolve and compete cost-effectively on a global scale. It was a significant moment for the British transformers industry and UK manufacturing as a whole," he adds with a proud smile.

By the late 1970s, this fundamental niche component had quickly put Miles Platts on the global electronics map, with an initial customer base to include the UK, the Americas, Australia and South Africa, all of which

used the imperial unit of measurement.

In 1979, Miles Platts looked to metric Europe, broadening its customer base further. Alongside three German manufacturers, Miles Platts enjoyed tier one status as one of the few globally-operational manufacturers which could deliver, both in terms of quality and quantity.

"When you run a family business, you also know the families of your staff."

Managing director David Platts

Today, Miles Platts is still loyal to its origins as a bobbin manufacturer: China and the Far East may have played an impressive game of catch-up, but the day when David will consider these rivals to be ahead is a long way off, with Miles Platts' exports to the Far East continuing to grow.

He adds: "High volume manufacture has long since moved to China and our focus is on medium-sized batches of 5,000 to 100,000 per month."

"Our European customers value and appreciate that our in-house design, engineering and production capabilities are local to them. Coupled with the additional benefits of sales support and stock-holding, this provides the ideal partnership. Of course, we have to offer a cost-effective service, which is achieved through fully-automated production."

But it hasn't always been this way, as David is quick to point out. "When the Japanese economy crashed around 1999, the electronics components manu-

facturers of the Far East came to Europe and North America to sell their products – and at significantly lower prices," he recalls.

"With our four biggest customers moving their manufacturing facilities from Europe to the Far East, we lost 25 per cent of our sales," he explains. "We had to adapt to this change and make cuts, and that included redundancies," David recalls.

"When you run a family business, you also know the families of your staff. It's a very painful thing to have to make redundancies – you feel it a lot more than in a faceless institution where there is little personal contact."

Lesser characters would have deserted the sinking ship at this point, but David and his staff weathered the storm, diversifying into technical moulding, which accounts for 45 per cent of the firm's current turnover, and rising.

"Instead of just supplying the bobbin to go in a transformer for a mobile phone charger, we now make the charger case too, fitted with moulded-in mains pins as well," says David. "We are still serving the same sectors of the industry, but with a greater variety of technical products."

One of the most notable contracts won recently is in the automotive sector for parking sensors, to the tune of 1.4 million pieces per month. This adds to the already healthy export order book, which currently stands at 55 per cent.

"We have shown remarkable recovery in the last three years and we're now one year into an investment programme that includes new state-of-the-art premises and equipment. We're enjoying good times again," says David, the man at the controls of a trailblazing train set.

MILES-PLATTS



Precision Technical Mouldings and Tool Making

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