

COVER STORY

POLIVAC INTERNATIONAL: Meeting the Australian manufacturing challenge

High quality products supported by their own local manufacturing, sales and service team. That's what Polivac International represents. Alan Hardcastle reports.

FOR Polivac International's management team there is an ongoing challenge to manufacture the bulk of its range in Australia. Inventor of the world's first suction polisher in the late 1960's, the company's pioneering spirit remains.

"There is always the attraction to cut costs and manufacture offshore but we want to stay here," said managing director and majority shareholder Tony Antonius.

And echoing what so many other Australian parents feel he added, "we have to give our kids a future".

Antonius believes that people are the country's real asset and that government will have a change of heart and water down its scorched earth policy to local manufacturing.

As well as a spirited approach to product innovation, Polivac has also needed great resolve corporately. It has made more comebacks than Lazarus, most recently in September 1990 when purchased from receivers by Antonius and partners.

In fact, Polivac has been making

floor polishers since 1940 and its innovative product design has driven sales internationally over the decades.

With existing commercial markets in Hong Kong, China, New Zealand, Fiji and the US, Polivac now has high hopes for an imminent drive into Japan.

"Japan is a very important project for us," said Antonius.

"Its size and lack of local product has created a real opportunity which we are planning to meet with a motor specifically developed to cope with that country's peculiar electric power system."

New team to kick goals

Antonius is quite open about Polivac's checkered corporate history and is also candid about the company's quest to build a strong management team.

"We have a relatively new team on board."

It includes finance controller Robert McInnes, Victorian sales manager Ron Jean (ex-Cleancare)

and Queensland sales manager John Hiscock. Production manager Ken Astall and NSW sales manager Glen Russell complement the team.

"I believe this team will grow our business and give us improved results," Antonius exclaimed.

"We are presently turning over more than \$4 million per annum with projected sales of \$15 million in 1995."

An increasing share will be accounted for by exports, and hopefully Japan.

Polivac believes it is number two in the polishing machine market behind JRP but is confident of taking the number one spot in the short to medium term.

Scrubber ambitions

Recognised for its full range of polishing machines, Polivac International will be placing increasing emphasis on its automatic scrubber line-up in order to balance its sales base.

"Presently polishing machines make up some 80 per cent of our turnover, auto scrubbers 15 per cent and then vacuum cleaners and chemicals the rest," said Antonius.

The recent market success of Polivac's 17 inch Minimatic auto scrubber has given the company a real fillip in its quest to build that segment to about half the business.

The Polivac product formula is economical design, competitive price and local service.

"Everywhere we show the Minimatic it gets a great response, being well priced and fully featured," pointed out Antonius.

It features the Polidrive sealed and oil-filled direct drive gearbox



Polivac is looking to the number one spot in the floor polishers market... It's come a long way since it began manufacturing polishers in 1940.

and patented off-set motor position that counter balances starting torque.

Another product that reflects Polivac's custom-built approach is the PIG portable canister vacuum cleaner which is described as a rugged, efficient commercial vacuum cleaner possessing large capacity and convenience.

New to the market and soon to be released by Polivac is a PV25 with a helical gear cut shaft, a canvas/bakelite drive gear and sealed bearings.

According to Polivac the development of this machine comes as a result of the reputation of pinion driven PV25s for unreliability and noise pitch. It claims the new PV25 is much quieter with more torque.

Both the super and high speed models are driven by a 1300 watt motor, which together with the gearbox was designed by Polivac factory staff and engineering companies.

In what Antonius perceives as a price driven market, Polivac remains confident that its innovative design and quality manufacture track record augurs well for a bright corporate future.



Tony Antonius is confident about Polivac's export future.