

Danube to double business

Laundry equipment manufacturer Danube employs the latest technology to maintain strong relationships with its clients worldwide, as the company's Bernard Jomard tells **Karien Jonckheere**

It may be off-putting to others, but to Bernard Jomard there's nothing offensive about a large load of dirty laundry.

Jomard is managing director and export manager for Danube International, one of the world's largest industrial laundry equipment manufacturers. And the company has certainly dealt with its fair share of laundry over the years.

The industry giant was established in 1947 in France and in the last 60 years has spread to more than 60 countries around the globe, with more than 60% of its products currently being exported internationally.

For the past two decades, that percentage has also included exports to the Middle East, with importers in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

"We have been in the Middle East for 20 years now, after recognising that it was a rapidly expanding market," says Jomard.

"There are so many new hotel projects and developments, especially in places like Dubai, and that provides some excellent opportunities for us to create partnerships with these hotels, providing them with the best quality laundry equipment at reasonable prices."

Hotels and hospitals form Danube International's largest client base and it is the phenomenal number of hotel developments that have made the Middle East such an important market for the company.

"We have identified the Middle East as a key area of growth for the company," confirms Jomard. "At the moment, the area brings in 5% of our turnover, but our target is to reach at least 10% within two to three years."

"In an area with such rapid development taking place, we believe that this is a realistic target and look forward to expanding our operations [in the region]."

"The plan now is to invest in building partnerships with a number of regional distributors and thus gain a national presence. Those chosen must be ready to promote the range and the brand aggressively."

"There is a reasonable amount of competition in the Middle East, but



Danube International strives to constantly extend its range of laundry machines and deliver greater innovation to clients by regularly patenting new developments.

we are confident that our products and services speak for themselves, standing apart from that competition. We will be present at most of the major trade shows in the area in order to inform our growing customer base of our new products, and of how competitively priced they are," he says.

"These are exciting times for Danube as we continue to strive to raise our profile worldwide in order to become a truly global organisation."

At present, the company is one of the largest international manufacturers of flatwork dryer-ironers and barrier washers, and also produces a full range of tumble dryers and front-loading washer extractors.

"We are offering our markets not only quality and innovation — with our policy of patenting at least one development each year — but at the

same time we are also offering competitive pricing," explains Jomard. "Pricing throughout is extremely competitive and it is a very important part of Danube's strategy in all our markets."

A 15kg barrier washer, the smallest on the market, was patented in 2002. An automatic weighting system, designed for monitoring and tracking loads, followed in 2003, and is now available as an option for washers or barrier washers. A third innovation — an automatic speed system — was patented in 2001 and is now an inexpensive option for all dryer ironers, allowing linen to go straight from washer to ironer without having to adjust ironer speed manually.

"The necessary calculations and adjustments are automatic and take account of both linen and room humidity," Jomard explains.

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Jomard believes that the volume demand lies particularly with washers and dryers, but he also emphasises the breadth of the company's product range.

“We offer a full range of laundry equipment,” he says. “And only one of our competitors can do that. Innovation is another of Danube's strength, with its annual patenting policy.”

“Apart from our incredible range of products, however, what makes Danube International unique is the service we provide,” he continues. “As an organisation, Danube believes strongly in having the right communication strategy in place and we have spent a lot of money on technology to get this right, both on our own premises [in Lamotte Beuvron in France's Loire region] for communicating with our employees, and as a support tool for our distributors and customers.”

Danube is prepared to invest fully to support its distributors in using their local knowledge and contacts to the fullest to proactively market and promote the Danube products and brand name, providing the backup that customers demand, according to Jomard.

“Danube's own team of engineers train the distributors' service staff at our registered training centre in France. When necessary, the engineers also help with the commissioning of equipment for big installations,” he says.

“The company is also set up for video-conferences with distributors, customers, suppliers and sub-contractors. These facilities are also an

excellent way to provide face-to-face advice to service engineers.”

Danube's web site also offers a full range of technical help in all areas for dealers and end users, as well as information on spares, safety aspects and other data.

The information on the site includes maintenance instructions, technical drawings, electrical diagrams and interactive 3-D drawings, which are particularly helpful to engineers, who can see in virtual mode how the machine is constructed.

“Laundry design and sizing is another web service that we offer. By going through a series of questions about the prospective end user's business, and the amount and type of linen they need to process, Danube can propose a solution that covers the number and type of machines, and the capacities they will need. The service can also be extended to suggest potential laundry lay-outs,” Jomard explains.

“In short, every kind of technical help is available for prospective distributor partners. If the business is financially sound, credit will be offered, as well as free training, so distributors prepared to be proactive will not just have a high quality product at competitive prices, but will also have all the resources they need to make a partnership with Danube profitable for both parties,” he says.

“With these services and structures in place, and a state-of-the-art communications strategy, I believe that Danube's worldwide — and regional — expansion targets are well within reach.” HME

ABOUT THE DANUBE PRODUCT RANGE

- Danube International's extensive range of washer extractors has been designed to reduce water, utilities and detergent consumption.
- Most of the company's machines require 11 liters of water per kilogram washed.
- The washers are built for efficient extraction, with a G-Force up to 440G on the company's ASEP and CS ranges.
- Less water usage and more efficient extraction saves money on water and utilities — there is less water to heat, and drying linens is faster and uses less energy.
- All the machines are built to be durable and are designed with large door openings and ergonomic features.