

COVER STORY SPONSORED BY DANUBE INTERNATIONAL



# High-tech quality at the right price

**Danube International is seeking to raise its UK profile by signing agreements with local distributors. Those prepared to be proactive will be able to offer quality, innovation and competitive prices to the OPL market**

**D**anube International, based in Lamotte-Beuvron in France's Loire region, manufactures for a global market. Established in 1947, the company is now one of the biggest manufacturers worldwide of both flatwork dryer ironers and barrier washers, as well as producing a full range of tumble dryers and front-loading washer-extractors for the OPL market. It offers its markets not only quality and innovation, with a policy of patenting one development each year, but at the same time it also offers competitive pricing. Indeed, pricing is essential to its strategy, says Danube's managing director Bernard Jomard. Last year the company was present in 52 countries and has been successful in most of Europe including Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Austria, as well as eastern Europe. It exports high volumes to the USA

and, to a lesser extent, to south America and the Far East – Thailand, China and Vietnam.

To date, however, its UK profile has been relatively low. But this is an important market and Bernard Jomard is determined to raise the profile. The plan now, he says, 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. But Danube feels it has much to offer both the UK OPL market and prospective distributors.

#### In-depth range

The focus will be on washers and dryers, for that is where the volume demand lies. But Bernard Jomard stresses the depth of the company's product range. "We offer a full range of laundry equipment, and only one of our competitors can do that." This range includes front-loading washers from 6kg to 55kg, side-loading washers (including gas-heated washers) from 27kg to 67kg, tumble dryers from 6kg to 65kg, and barrier washers from 15kg to 67kg. Finishing equipment includes dryer ironers with widths from 1.4m to 3.2m with cylinder diameters of 200mm, 320mm and 500mm, and optional feeders, folders, cross-folders and stackers.

#### Competitive price strategy

Further, pricing throughout is extremely competitive, an important part of Danube's strategy in all its markets.

COVER STORY SPONSORED BY DANUBE INTERNATIONAL

**SMALLEST BARRIER:** Danube will be launching a 15kg barrier washer, the smallest in this class, at Texcare in Frankfurt

Looking at the main UK products in more detail, Bernard Jomard describes some of their benefits. Washer-extractors have a high G factor (350G on front-loading models and 440G on side-loaders and barrier machines).

Water consumption is an average of 11litres/kg to 13litres/kg. Residual humidity on side-loading machines and also on barrier washers is approximately 35%, saving energy in the drying section.

Danube dryers are marked out from the competition in using direct drive with frequency converter rather than a belt, and in having reverse action as standard – again providing the customer with good value products. By avoiding the use of a belt, you also avoid most of the problems that laundries encounter with dryers, says Bernard Jomard.

Innovation is another Danube strength with its annual patenting policy. In the past three years it has patented three developments:

- A 15kg barrier washer, the smallest on the market, was patented in 2002 and will be launched at Texcare in June. Suitable for applications such as nursing homes, it will be marketed at the same price as a standard washer, making it extremely good value
- An automatic weighting system, patented in 2003, is now available as an option for washers or barrier washers. It is designed for monitoring and tracking loads. Each load can have a number that is linked to detergent and water use for the cycles used
- An automatic speed system, patented in 2001, is now an inexpensive option for all dryer ironers. This allows linen to go straight from washer to ironer without having to adjust ironer speed manually, as the necessary calculations and adjustments are automatic and take account of both linen and room humidity.

Quality standards are high. The company has ISO9001/2000 quality control approval – problems account for less than 0.2% of turnover. Products carry the required country approvals, such as CE, CSA and ETL for the USA and so on.

Danube is prepared to invest fully to support the distributors it signs so they can use their local knowledge and contacts to the fullest to proactively market and promote the Danube products and brand and provide the back-up their customers will demand.

Distributors' service staff will be fully trained by a team of Danube's own engineers. (The company is a registered training centre in France.) These engineers can also help with the commissioning of equipment where needed, such as if there is a big installation to handle.

**Investing in communication**

As an organisation Danube believes strongly in having the right communication and has spent heavily on technology to this end, both in its own premises for communicating with its employees and as a support tool for its distributors and customers. It can hold videolink conferences with suppliers and sub-contractors, and this is also an excellent method for handling quality and service problems as service engineers will be able to get face-to-face advice.

A huge amount of information can be obtained from the website, [www.danube-international.com](http://www.danube-international.com), where

**SIDE-LOADERS:** Danube's in-depth range includes side-loading washers with a 440 G-factor

**DIRECT DRIVE AND REVERSE:** Danube dryers use a direct drive and frequency inverters, rather than belts, and reverse action is standard on all



**MAIN ATTRACTION:** Front-loading washer-extractors will be one of the main products for the UK

**HOTEL MARKET:** Danube has worked on laundry projects with hotel groups worldwide

English is the standard language. From this, distributors can obtain technical help in all areas, spares, safety aspects and other data, both from the dealer point of view and that of the user, allowing dealers to help themselves and their customers.

Features to look out for include:

- maintenance instructions
- technical drawings
- electrical diagrams and
- interactive 3D drawings, particularly helpful as engineers can see, in virtual mode, how the machine is constructed, as it is built as they watch.

Laundry design and sizing is another web service. 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 a laundry lay-out.

In short, says Mr Jomard, 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 have not just a high-quality product at competitive prices, they will also have all the resources they need to make a partnership with Danube profitable for both parties.

And Bernard Jomard is determined to raise the UK profile. He has one message for the UK's distributors: "If you can't join us in this, we will beat you." **LCN**