



FLEXIBILITY AND TECHNOLOGY

The leading Italian packaging machine producer SMI has successfully managed to set a new standard in the world of packaging, by investing in an effective mix of technological improvement and a flexible approach to the needs of its customers. Massimo Miato reports.

The SMI Group was founded in 1987 as a small enterprise, and since then has grown to become one of today's most important packaging machine producers worldwide. This success is a result of the company's strong will to invest in research and innovation, by keeping in mind the ever-changing needs of the customers and by providing them with a competitive price/quality ratio at the same time.

Ensuring a flexible approach to the needs of customers is definitely one of the secrets behind the success of SMI, a firm which has managed to establish long-term collaborations with almost all of the most important food and beverage industrial giants, including such brands as Nestlé, Danone, Unilever, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, P&G, Heinz, Heineken, SABMiller, Inbev and Carlsberg. In 2007, the company invoiced more than €100 million and it employed about 560 people. Something like 90 per cent of the group's turnover comes from exports, as SMI successfully operates in the European markets, as well as in fast-growing countries such as China, Russia, Turkey and Mexico.

Structure

The structure of the Italian company is actually quite diversified, as the SMI Group is made up of four separate divisions, two subsidiaries and an international network of branches taking care of the group's sales and after-sales assistance activities. Each of the divisions of the group has specialised in a certain production, by developing its own brand. Apart from the SMI brand itself, which is associated with secondary packaging machines, the list includes brands such as SMIForm, a leading manufacturer of stretch blow moulders and PET blow moulding machines, SMILine, the specialist in air conveyors and conveyors belts, SMIMec, a producer of moulds for blow moulding machines, and SMITec, which takes care of automation systems and components.

This diversified approach to business has its advantages, especially when it comes to ensuring flexibility and a fast response to the needs of the customers – a strategy which has allowed SMI to grow a lot in the highly competitive global market, by ensuring the company's development in new market segments through the creation of new products and new branches. ▶



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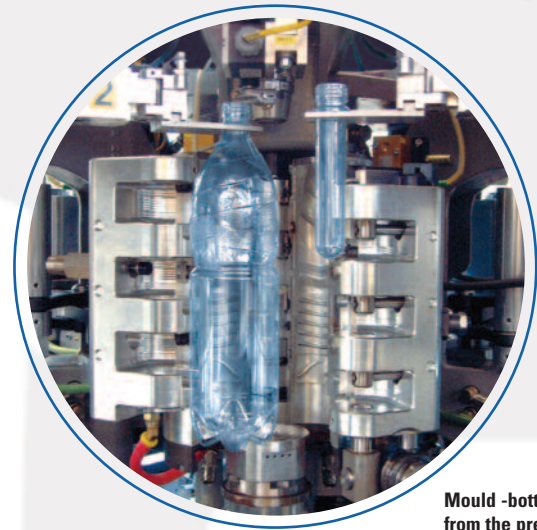
Another very important strategy for ensuring the success of the company is its attention to establishing strong synergies within its various branches, with the sole aim of developing new horizons for its products by ensuring that each of the company's various branches has the same high quality approach to technological improvement. This strategy also guarantees the customers a higher level of quality, by providing them with faster deliveries and an endless supply of spare parts.

Key features

Maintaining a very wide catalogue has allowed SMI to become the ideal partner for a number of applications in the packaging sector, ranging from beverage to wrapping, conveying and many others. However, almost every one of the company's machines share the same features: attention to energy saving, production efficiency and eco compatibility of products and processes. Once again, this is a direct result of the company's attention to research and technological improvement, since SMI can count on a great deal of experience in using the best available technologies for the packaging sector, such as the so-called digital servo-driving systems, which have set a new standard in the sector since the group started to use them back in 1996.



Production line with SMI machines (shrink wrappers and conveyors)



Mould -bottle realized from the preform

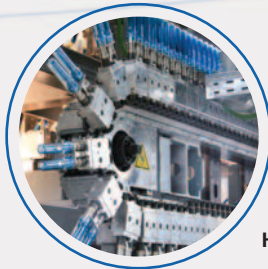
Every year, the SMI Group invests something like four per cent of its overall turnover in research, with the sole aim of remaining one step ahead in terms of providing customers with technologically advanced solutions, whilst maintaining a global approach to the needs of the markets at the same time. The group has its own scientific department, which is in charge of testing prototypes and developing new applications and new processes by using a multidisciplinary approach, through the activity of more than 70 researchers that ensure the competitiveness of the company's newly developed machines and production processes.

Also, the new SMI technological centre, called SMILab, is a perfect example of how environmental care is important for the Italian company: the whole complex is self-sufficient in terms of energy use, thanks to a small hydroelectric power plant that provides the whole structure with green energy.

Customer satisfaction

Ensuring that the needs of customers are met is another major concern for SMI. Every single one of the group's activities is oriented towards a full customer satisfaction approach, which means sharing the same goals as the customers and being able to provide them with innovative solutions. Also, the activity of the company's customer care centre is aimed at providing clients with fully customisable solutions, a feature which is even more important when considering the group's attention to communication – a very important means for making customers aware of the latest innovative packaging machines created by SMI.

And since the Italian company operates in more than 130 countries worldwide, the next step in the development of SMI will involve investing more in communication, customer satisfaction and technology. □



Heating of preform



Air recovery system installed in our SR blow moulding



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The **Gava Group** now consists of commercial and operative Offices in five continents and has the valued support of a specialized network of Agents around the globe.

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