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INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS OF THE MONTH



FINE FILTERS

Queen's Award winner BOFA, with a laser focus, is targeting the Far East

BOFA International has just won a Queen's Award for innovation. The company, based in Poole, manufactures fume extraction and filtration technology and last won a Queen's Award, for export, in 2012.

Sales manager for Europe John Twigg says: "When I'm doing presentations to new clients across Europe and the world, it comes in very handy. It shows that we're rated an outstanding company by the government, which carries a lot of weight. And now we can continue with that message for another five years."

BOFA began as a family business in 1987 and has grown steadily over the decades, and more rapidly in recent years. When Twigg joined eight years ago when turnover was about £5m and the company had 50 employees. Today, 200 people work at its factory headquarters and turnover this year is £24m – up 30 per cent in the last year alone. Twigg says 80 per cent of that is due to export, "so international sales are absolutely massive for us".

Beyond Dorset, BOFA has an American distribution and sales centre in Staunton, Illinois, where 22 staff are based. And it recently opened an office in Germany. These outposts help it sell its fume extraction systems into more than 100 countries

worldwide, via a network of distribution partners.

Twigg says: "We sell a variety of different products in the markets we're in, but predominantly our main business comes from the laser market. Our technology deals with the fumes from laser marking and laser processes on different materials, which is a big market. It can also be used for the smell and VOCs (volatile organic compounds) that come off printing, as well as emerging markets such as dental and 3D printing."

The customers are OEM partners, says Twigg. "They are manufacturers of machines that produce smoke as part of their process, so we establish partnerships with them to deal with that smoke. We may build our machines onto their machines, or put a machine to the side of their machines to capture the smoke."

Europe is the biggest market for its products – BOFA enjoys strong sales in Germany, France and the Benelux nations – followed closely by the US and the UK.

Prospective markets include the Far East and India but could be anywhere there are advanced industrial centres with laser processes. Twigg says: "Our OEM partners sell globally to any company that really needs their product."

Twigg flies a couple of times a month to Europe and occasionally to India and other territories.

"Recently I've been to Israel for a technical discussion with a new partner. Generally I do that if we're launching a new product, or if they have a new process they'd like to discuss a product for," he says. "I also visit distributors to provide training – we have an established network for the electronics industry, and I visit exhibitions across Europe to look for new areas for potential sales."

Does he have any travel tips? "As long as I remember my passport, credit card and laptop, everything else is optional. Once, my luggage got lost and I turned up to a meeting in T-shirt, shorts and a pair of flipflops, but I had my laptop so I was still able to attend. It was embarrassing – it was southern Italy and they were suited and booted, but I won the client. We've been working together for eight years!"

For the past four years BOFA has sold its patented Intelligent Operating (iQ)

platform, which won it the Queen's Award. It provides operators with data for monitoring the effectiveness of fume extraction in industrial processes, which helps avoid expensive downtime.

Its success ensures that Twigg will do more

travelling, but where's his favourite airport? He answers instantly. "It's got to be Munich – there's a brewery called Airbrau, and they do lovely food and brew their own beer. I always arrive an hour early."

"Generally I travel if we're launching a new product, or want to discuss a new process."

If you need advice on flights and airport services worldwide, Bristol Airport has a business travel team to provide information. Email businesstravel@bristolairport.com