



High technology materials, production expertise and systematic manufacturing processes are all very Japanese traits, so it should come as no surprise that these are the credo at Hoya in Wrexham.

Since last February the man at the helm has been Martin Batho, a former production manager at the Wrexham-based lens plant and someone with 27 years' experience of world-class ophthalmic lens manufacturing systems and techniques. Now UK managing director, his manner epitomises Hoya itself: understated, confident and exuding more than a little quality. His current challenge is getting UK independents to take another look at using Hoya for their lens manufacturing needs.

In its efforts to build up its base of independent customers, Hoya has been applying some of the logic which Batho says has made it a world-class manufacturer, into the service and sales side of the business.

'We have put a lot into the measurement of call activity. It's a question of doing the numbers. The success I had in operations was because I am a measurements person. If you can't measure it you can't improve it.' This doesn't mean taking away people's personality or freedom but creating a structure. 'We are actively acquiring new independent accounts,' he says.

Production shift

Up until five years ago the Japanese lens giant had two facilities at its North Wales site. One cast stock and semi-finished lenses for the global market and the other manufactured product for the UK and European region.

When production of cast lenses



Martin Batho: Spending time with dispensing opticians is central to Hoya's independent recruitment drive

Big in Japan ...and Wrexham

Chris Bennett gets the low-down on Hoya's continuing manufacturing in Europe and support for independent practices

was moved to the Far East, lens manufacturing was relocated to the larger production site. That move also coincided with a shift in Hoya's approach to the UK market which saw it add major corporate sector customers to its independent clientele.

This sets up obvious sensitivities which Batho, is keen to assuage. He insists there are no conflicts for Hoya in managing these two types of customer and goes as far as to say this

actually provides benefits for both.

'We have developed a supply chain for each different channel,' he says. Individual large clients have dedicated routes, corporate business another and the independent sector another still. There is no hierarchy in this, he says, each customer simply has different needs.

Where one benefits the other is in the expertise the business has and the economies of scale that large volumes bring.

'What goes on here in Wrexham is very much for the independent business, but in picking up the corporate sector volumes initially that gave us the investment and total performance in terms of quality, capacity and systems.' One example is Hoya's high vacuum deposition machines which were inherited from the days of mass manufacturing. These are state of the art, constant pressure chambers which have double the volume of machines other manufacturers would use.

Where Batho really comes alive is when talking about the quality and ethos of Hoya's manufacturing. This is thanks to his 27 years of experience in the production side of the business. He was previously the head of cast lens manufac-



Quality control at Wrexham is relentless



ture in the UK and when that moved overseas he took the opportunity to work in Hoya facilities around the world.

A quick tour around the production facility gives a flavour of the standards held. The quality control at Wrexham is relentless, while production is kept flowing through flexible and variable 24/5 and 12/2 working. Clean areas are clean and every precaution is taken to ensure right first-time results.

'There is almost no work in progress. It's work in progress that kills you because it slows the whole system down,' he says.

Having worked in Hoya plants around the world, Batho says there is no doubt in his mind that sales volumes follow delivery and performance. 'Quality and service have got to be a given,' he says, but the delivery of product is what will make sales fall or rise. At this point, Batho draws a bell curve showing 98 per cent of Hoya deliveries in the earlier than expected region. Customers will be alerted to the late arrival of the other 2 per cent to minimise the damage.

While the change in focus at Hoya has boosted volume, he estimates a 10-12 per cent market share, they have also had an impact on other parts of the customer base which Batho is keen to address.

He says much of the change implemented since his arrival has been to underpin Hoya's support for independent practices. 'We probably have some more work to do to support them but sales are growing with our existing customers and we are looking to increase that number.'

He says the key is getting out into the market to show new independent practice customers what Hoya is all about. The fundamentals are good service, high-quality products, premium coatings and support and communication. To get its message



A sorting machine at the plant

across, Hoya has reduced the territories of its field reps, enabling them to visit customers more frequently and spend more quality time with them.

Customer focus

Batho has also introduced more joined up thinking between the telephone and field support teams. This means inbound customer calls will always be routed to the same support team members and information, about and for customers, is shared between the team in Wrexham and those out on the road.

That process is working, insists Batho. He says he finds no resistance to new customers using Hoya, they simply need to be given the opportunity. 'Materials and surface treatments, that's what we do extremely well. We just need to get customers to try us.' With the help of its coating products such as 'Super Hi-Vision' as an incentive, this approach is working.

While these premium products are where Hoya wants to be, Batho is keen to explain that the company's breadth is its real strength. 'Hoya is a quality lens company but we have a complete

range of products.' To make the point he cites Hoya's 1.9-index mineral range.

Spending time with dispensing opticians is central to this independent recruitment drive. 'If you spend time with the dispensers explaining the products you take away the barriers, that's when the opportunities come.' He says all but one of the field force is a DO and this enables them to speak to dispensers in a practical and knowledgeable way.

Batho is characteristically sanguine about the message the field force has to apply to get practices to try the product.

'The main hurdle is getting them familiar with the product. Dispensing opticians will use what they know and getting them to change can be a challenge. I think that the opportunity is still there for the independents to thrive and flourish.'

'It's a question of offering something different. We offer a complete service, the full shooting match. We have better products, better services and better materials. The barrier is getting people to trial us. When they do they like the response they get.' ●





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