

IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW, LUCA PARSANI, SALES DIRECTOR OF BERGAMO, ITALY-BASED SOLEMA TALKS WITH DAN BRUNTON ABOUT THE COMPANY'S ACQUISITION OF THE PADS AND PARTITIONS BUSINESS OF RODA AND HOW THEY INTEND TO DEVELOP THIS RANGE OF SPECIALIST CONVERTING EQUIPMENT.

BREATHING LIFE

BACK INTO A FAMOUS NAME

If you were in the print and graphics arts industry, Solema would be pretty much a household name. As a corrugated packaging industry professional, you would be forgiven for asking 'Who?'. Having purchased certain intellectual rights and the use of the brand identity of Roda from BHS Corrugated in 2013, the Italian manufacturer Solema has hit the ground running as it starts to

generate significant interest for the range of partition assemblers and pad cutters for the fibreboard industries.

Established in 1982 in Bergamo, northern Italy, Solema was founded by Ennio Mazzola. Thirty two years later, Mr Mazzola is still active in the business, heading up the Technical Department. Employing 65 people at a series of sites just outside of Bergamo, the company generates annual sales in excess of €8 million per annum. The company has spent the last 30+ years designing and manufacturing automatic handling solutions for the graphic arts industry. Palletisers, materials handling conveyors – machines you might recognise, but in a smaller, more intricate scale, specifically for books.

The company is a machine builder through and through. It has earned a global reputation as one of the leading designers and manufacturers of tailor made handling solutions. It works with leading OEMs such as Muller Martini, Kolbus and Heideberg — to name just a few. With its own sales and parts office in the USA, a dedicated office in Germany and an extensive network of sales agents around the globe, the company has machines running on every continent. "We have never really had to actively sell our products as word of mouth acted as our best

A busy factory floor with handling and palletizing solutions ready for despatch to customers in the graphics art market.





salesman,” jokes Luca Parsani, Sales Director. “It’s a pretty typical story — we found success in the print industry and experienced growth of our market share as the years went on by continuously supporting our customers with flexible and reliable solutions. In around 2007, Mr Mazzola realised that we were reaching a point where we had designed everything we could for the print industry. So he decided that we needed to branch out into new industries if we were to continue on an upward growth curve. We started to look at other sectors, to see where we could apply our knowledge and expertise to solve handling issues. But then came the financial crisis of 2008 and the massive impact it had on the print sector – we needed to move fast to ensure we had a future – this is when we started to look for other businesses to acquire.”

Mr Parsani continues, “We knew of Roda and some of its products, because we had shared customers in the book printing industry; one of the companies was using our systems already and had a pad cutter from Roda, which they used to cut solidboard covers for its books. This is when Roda’s Sales

Director, Dino Reni, explained to us it could be worth having a meeting with Roda’s owner, BHS Corrugated, to see if we might be able to do a deal. That was in late 2012.”

So the process of research and negotiation started. Solema talked to existing Roda customers in the corrugated sector and asked what they thought needed to be done to enhance the range of products and what could be done differently. With good input from the industry, the team at Solema decided they wanted to try and move forward with the acquisition. However, the deal would be for specific parts of

the business, namely the pads and partition equipment. “Lars Engel had told us that there was a possibility that another company would buy the pre-feeder aspect of the business, which meant we could craft a deal that would see us acquire the intellectual property, use of the logo, the sales network, certain engineers, spare parts, as well as the After-Sales Manager from Roda. Once the deal was completed in May 2013, we did a back-to-back deal with Dücker, (who acquired the pre-feeder business), whereby we agreed to supply the spare parts for all existing Roda pre-feeders in the market,” continues Mr Parsani.

Moving forward

The team took the quiet summer months to get to grips with this ‘new’ business they had acquired and took the decision to sit patiently before rolling out to market while getting themselves fully acquainted with the new products. “We didn’t do too much in terms of marketing and promotion between the completion of the deal in May and the summer months,” explains Mr Parsani. “We decided to wait until 1st September, at which

The company’s headquarters just outside of Bergamo, Northern Italy.





Andax Jumbo partition assembler

time we started to contact the market proactively. Since September, we have successfully sold and installed no fewer than 11 machines around the world, a most encouraging start.” This list of machines includes three Andax partition assemblers, an Andax Jumbo partition assembler (which was being shipped to the customer on the day of the visit, shown in the picture, above, on the fork lift truck), two Ideal Gandria solidboard partition cutters (including one complete rebuild), two Gandria pad cutter/scorer/creasers, one Casiermatic partition assembler (with integrated gluer unit for gluing the partitions into a box) and two Moser solidboard partition assemblers.

“To be honest, we were not too sure what to expect when we entered the market,” recounts Mr Parsani. “Being new to the corrugated industry, we didn’t know how people would react to our entry to the market. We knew what the name Roda meant to the industry and we were keen to breath new life into the brand, to generate fresh momentum. There is no doubt that we have worked hard to fulfil expectations and have been very happy with how people have reacted to us so far. Our network of

sales agents have done an excellent job and now we are committing to re-establishing the name with participation at leading

trade shows, conferences and meetings around the world. But rather than just promoting an established range of machines, we will be developing and enhancing the range with the years of experience we have as designers and manufacturers of machinery. Our brand — ‘Solema — incorporating RODA technology’ shows the market that we are here for the long run and determined to evolve this range of converting solutions. We will take all the best attributes and then add our own engineering expertise to allow us to offer the best solutions on the market.” ■



Above and below: Two of the many machines being built for imminent delivery.

