

IRIS Inspection Machines:

R&D FOCUS AT INSPECTION SOLUTIONS INNOVATOR

company development

Since its founding in 2001, IRIS Inspection Machines has emerged as a leading global supplier of non-contact camera inspection technology for the glass container industry. Under the Evolution brand name, the company has developed a range of equipment that helps glassmakers to improve

their manufacturing processes and ensure the quality of production. IRIS was the first to develop the 12-camera concept and introduced LED finish inspection solutions.

Turnover has increased by 25 per cent for each of the last four years. Initially, most business was conducted in Europe but today,

the customer base is global, including glass container producers throughout Asia, North and South America, Africa and the Middle East. Currently, there are almost 1000 machines in operation throughout the world. IRIS started by serving customers in the beer and pharmaceutical glass industries but now also cov-



These are exciting times at IRIS Inspection Machines. Relocation to new premises should help facilitate the delivery of a growing order book for the inspection solutions specialist and the development of its next generation of product innovations.

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ers the perfumery and cosmetics sector, as well as manufacturers of drinking ware/tumblers. A particular strength is the ability to inspect many different articles simultaneously on the same line, all without contacting the products and without the assistance of mechanical rotation.
According to Jean-Luc Logel,

Managing Director, the main advantage of non-contact inspection is that it can be performed at higher speeds and with better repeatability. “This non-contact approach represents the future and is performed with camera technology. Previously, these machines were used to inspect visual faults only but today, they

can also inspect the finish, base and mould number, as well as monitoring for some checks.” For the inspection of faults that cannot currently be performed via non-contact equipment, the company works closely with Heye International, thereby covering all inspection requirements at the cold end.

COMPANY DEVELOPMENT

IRIS expects this technology to evolve further in the coming years, one of the company's goals being to increase the speed and efficiency of its equipment. "It took us five years to gain the recognition of the European glass industry and 10 years to become a global player," says Jean-Luc Logel. "Developing appropriate solutions and gaining industry acceptance all takes time. In addition, while innovation is positive, it is necessary to offer a full range of support services and generate customer trust and loyalty."

The demands made of glass-makers are constantly evolving, as new products are introduced and different production challenges need to be addressed. IRIS equipment also has to adapt to overcome these problems and ensure ware quality. There is a roadmap of improvements for the company's equipment and visitors to glasstec 2014 exhibition in Germany next October can expect to see the next generation of IRIS non-contact inspection equipment on its stand. Details of these innovations are expected to be made available in the coming months, in addition to which the company plans to display working Evolution equipment at leading trade fairs in Brazil, China and Russia next year.

LARGER PREMISES

With more than 15 per cent of turnover reinvested in R&D every year, the IRIS team is working constantly on the latest versions of software for tomorrow's Evolution machines. To date, 12 different upgrades have been realized.

These efforts will be reinforced

following the company's recent relocation to larger premises at Bron on the outskirts of Lyon. Until now, IRIS has shared premises with sister company Centralp at nearby Venissieux but a growing order book and the need for enhanced customer service stimulated this summer's move. Designed to satisfy the company's long-term business needs, the 2,000 square-metre premises at Bron will feature enhanced R&D, production, customer service and training facilities.

"Frequent innovations in key component technologies relating to cameras, computers and light sources are driving our ability to realize further improvements to our equipment and the creation of separate software, image processing and mechanical engineering R&D departments at Bron will support these efforts" says IRIS Technical Director, Majd Rahmani. "The IRIS strategy is long-term and is based on partnerships developed with leading glass container manufacturers."

Together with sister company Centralp, IRIS employs 60 R&D engineers in the field of electronics, software and mecha-

tics. Employing just 36 people in total, the IRIS organisation in particular has invested substantially in the recruitment of skilled engineers, especially those involved in software and image processing. Consequently, drawing on the skills and resources of both businesses, the parent Wisetec Group is able to retain development know-how in-house, thereby avoiding the need to use external resources.

Also included at the Bron site is a larger production workshop, with sufficient capacity to assemble and test 20 inspection machines every month. There are also two training rooms and a permanent showroom of IRIS machines, together with dedicated sales, after sales, spare parts and administration offices.

CUSTOMER SUPPORT

"As a leader in technology, we anticipate customer needs and provide long-term and cost-efficient support for our solutions in the field of glass quality control" says Jean-Luc Logel. "The provision of increased customer services at the new Bron site is key to the sustained development of our business."



According to Logel, perfecting a product innovation means nothing if you fail to communicate to the customer how best to use it!

“In addition to providing on-site support via local staff, it is necessary for customer service staff at head office to communicate the latest modifications and advances to the customer, while also updating the knowledge of IRIS service personnel.”

Every member of the customer service team communicates in at least three different languages, thereby helping to improve this part of the process. Similarly, the training of IRIS service engineers represents an important element of the service provided, ensuring that they are updated with the company’s latest software and hardware modifications and the improvements that are available to customers.

Separately, IRIS introduced a

remote access facility in 2002, whereby equipment at the customer’s premises can be repaired/modified and upgraded remotely from Lyon.

In addition to the headquarters in Bron, the company has after sales offices in China, Thailand, the United States and Latin America, as well as a global network of 10 experienced agents. Via this network, valuable long-term relationships have been developed with agents who share the IRIS philosophy of looking to the long-term and are well known in their local markets. Regular dialogue is encouraged to reinforce relationships and to ensure that customer requirements are fully satisfied.

DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Bron facility provides a valuable backdrop to the company’s continuing evolution for the next 10 years. “We want to

continue to develop new products and bring new solutions to the glass industry... this building represents an important part of our strategy,” Jen-Luc Logel concludes. “We still have growth potential in terms of customers and product innovation for the next decade, so these markets remain our focus. We want to be the best that we can.” ■



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