

IMTS Machinery – Partnering in productivity

IMTS Machinery has built its reputation as a specialist in the delivery of world-class sheetmetal and laser cutting products by building strong long-lasting partnerships with its suppliers and its customers. By Dee Rudebeck.

Shortly after beginning work at Melbourne's IMTS Machinery in 2006, Simon Stain made his first phone call to the company's supplier, Prima Power in Italy, to introduce himself to his contact, Marco Daimo. Remarkably, 14 years later, it is still Marco who Simon calls at the Prima Power headquarters in Turin today, several times a month. Not only have the pair formed a watertight working relationship during that time, but they have a strong friendship.

IMTS Machinery may be a leading supplier of world-class sheetmetal and laser cutting products and the sole agent for Prima Power systems in Australia. However, it is the company's focus on relationships and longevity of experience that really sets it apart in the sheet metal fabrication market. Now business development manager at IMTS, Simon says that before coronavirus, he and Marco probably saw each other four or five times a year.

"Sometimes I would take clients to Europe for a product demonstration or Marco would come here to talk through a new system with our customers," says Simon. "Being Italian, it's almost like we're family, as opposed to business. We don't sit down and talk over a desk, it's over a meal and often with our partners and family."

This sense of long-standing connections is vitally important to IMTS because the purchase of one of its precision systems is not a one-off transaction, but the beginning of an ongoing relationship with their customer. Simon says that for new customers, they usually allow 9-12 months of regular contact from the time of purchase to the point where "the client is comfortable running the machine to its full potential". Helping clients achieve optimal performance of their machines is a key objective for IMTS.

Working out requirements

Buying machinery from IMTS begins with a thorough consultation service, helping the customer to decide on the best solution for their needs based on their particular work and budget, which could start from \$200,000 and upwards. Once an order is placed, it takes around three months for Prima Power to manufacture the machine, depending on size, and up to five weeks for it to be shipped to Australia. Then IMTS begins the installation, which can take from one to four weeks and involve two or three people on site and a number of cranes and forklifts.



IMTS' recent installation for air conditioning manufacturer Actron Air was possibly the largest system of its type installed in the Southern Hemisphere.

"After that, it's the start-up phase, where we set up the machine's parameters and then the training, when we take the customer through operating the machine and the programming software," says Simon. "After the customer begins full-blown production, we like to follow up three to six months later to check everything is going okay or to see if they need any refresher training."

Then the relationship shifts to annual scheduled maintenance visits, unless issues arise in between.

The machinery that IMTS can supply includes turret punches, press brakes and panel benders as well as laser cutting systems and large automation systems to connect machines together. The turret punches and panel benders are for lighter sheetmetal, up to 8mm but generally 3mm and below. The laser-cutting systems are for metal from 1mm up to 20 or 25mm for general fabrication or engineering components.

IMTS customers include Actron Air in Sydney, Daikin Australia in Sydney, and Glyde Metal Industries in Dandenong – a long-standing customer where IMTS has recently installed a Laser Genius with a 10kW fibre laser and a 21-shelf tower automation system – along with many other small- and large-scale manufacturers.

One-stop shop

Founded in 1994 by Peter Tucker, IMTS went from a one-man servicing show to a highly specialised outfit of technicians virtually overnight when Prima Power approached Peter in 2002 to be their exclusive agent of its systems in Australia and New Zealand. Peter is still Managing Director and also involved in servicing and installation.

Simon says that due to technological developments, the machines need less

servicing than in years past and the team at IMTS is smaller but more multi-skilled. Simon himself often project manages installation and training and says that customers like to see the person who sold them the machine is leading the project from start to finish. He believes that along with the team's longevity of service, the fact that IMTS focuses on only one brand gives them an edge because they know the Prima Power systems inside out.

"Prima Power is a very high-quality brand," explains Simon. "They're one of the biggest sheet metal manufacturers in the world, so it is that level of relationship that we've got with them, along with the range and quality of their machinery that has kept us exclusively supplying their product."

Simon jokes that he and his colleagues have all racked up long-service leave at IMTS and each have at least 15 to 20 years' experience in the laser and sheetmetal industry – Peter himself has close to 35.

"We are one of the longest-serving sales agents for Prima Power in the world and they refer to us as an official partner, which they haven't done for any other dealer. We are very highly experienced with their machinery."

It's worth noting that there are many subsidiaries within the Prima Industrie group, such as Prima Electro, which manufactures hardware such as the machine servo-drives and CNC systems, along with the HMI software. The overall Prima Industrie group has a staff of around 2,000 and production plants in Italy (Turin and Cologna Veneta) and in Seinajoki, Finland.

"Therefore, as a group Prima Power is a one-stop shop, which means that IMTS is a one-stop shop," says Simon. "If there is problem with a machine or questions about applications, you don't get the run-around and get sent elsewhere because another

Simon Stain, Business Development Manager at IMTS Machinery, (left) with Mark Wood, General Manager of Glyde Metal Industries.



manufacturer made the part or developed the software. We've probably got half a million dollars' worth of spare parts, always in stock in Melbourne, and can get anything else within a few days."

Upgrade at Actron Air

One exception to standard IMTS project timeframes was a job for air conditioning manufacturer Actron Air, which was unlike any other in scale – possibly the largest system of its type installed in the Southern Hemisphere.

Actron Air was looking to significantly increase its output at the same time as completely replacing its manufacturing system, which meant the installation had to go smoothly to minimise disruption to output schedules. IMTS competed with other suppliers in a process that took nearly two years, but in May 2016 Actron Air committed to the \$10m system with IMTS and Prima Power.

The installation began in early 2018 and lasted six months, compared to the average two weeks. The fully automatic material-handling solution includes three turret punches, an automatic panel bender, and a Night Train flexible manufacturing system with 300 storage cassettes holding up to 900 tons of material with a crane that feeds into the four machines. It covers 60m x 30m of floor space, with a height of 8m.

"The advantage for us is that we've significantly reduced the amount of forklift traffic and manual handling we need, and we've got much better utilisation of our

space," says Jon Maddox, Operations Manager at Actron Air. "We would have needed three or four guys before to load materials in and out of punches and folders throughout the process, which all took time. Now we load the material in once and that's the end of it.

"Effectively with the performance and efficiency of the Prima Power system, we've increased our overall capacity to 170% on what we had before. And we're doing that with five less heads."

After a tricky first six months of integrating software and connectivity issues, the system began to shine.

"By the end of the six months, we were kicking goals and starting to do very well," says Jon. "It's been consistent ever since. It's a been a very good investment for us."

The Actron Air system was a milestone installation that Simon says shows IMTS is more than capable of these large-scale installations. Although sales at the moment have taken a hit due to coronavirus, Simon is still receiving many enquiries per week.

"The inquiry level is still there, so we've just got look after our customers the best we can utilising the technology available to us," he remarks. "We're remotely working from home and continuing to support our customers as best as we can."

Simon says that a lot of IMTS support and service was provide online or over the phone previously, using programs such as Team Viewer: "The systems have internal cameras, so we can log on to

them and diagnose issues remotely. The new machines are moving to Industry 4.0, so they are self-reporting and sending diagnoses continuously to the Cloud. This means that if the machine recognises something is going wrong in itself, it reports to us and we ring the customer to let them know."

The plans for IMTS in the next two years involve a big push to grow the business, starting with an expansion of the sales team. Meanwhile, Simon still plans to play a part in installations.

"I'm trained as a toolmaker and I'm a very hands-on person," says Simon. "Once we've made a sale, I don't just move on to the next one. I enjoy putting a lot of focus into the customer and the overall project. When we're doing an installation, towards the end of the training, we'll often go for dinner with the customer and try to keep that family feeling that IMTS gets from Prima going with our customers as well."

It all comes back to making relationships the heart of the business and being committed to the future together.

"Because Marco and I have known each other so long, we can have a conversation with real depth, and not just about business," says Simon. "We know each other's families. At the end of the day, Prima Power and IMTS like to look after each other and our reputations, and that means looking out for our customers too."

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