

Mitas and B.A. Bush partnership boosts both businesses



Tyre manufacturer Mitas Tyres Ltd and distributor B.A. Bush have developed a close working relationship which has helped to create benefits for both parties, with both companies reporting recession-beating performances as Tyres & Accessories found out. With the recession biting hard, there has been a significant amount of turmoil in the tyre market. However, for two companies in the business, tyre manufacturer Mitas Tyres and tyre distributor B.A. Bush Ltd, the business outlook is apparently very positive.

Mitas Tyres Ltd, which is part of Czech Republic-based Mitas a.s which manufactures and distributes globally a wide range of agricultural, industrial and motorcycle tyres under its own Mitas and Cultor brands together with Continental under licence, is said to be experiencing strong growth across all sectors. One of the UK's leading tyre distributors, B.A. Bush & Son Ltd has quietly gone about its business over the years, expanding to meet demand, focusing on providing what customers want, utilising the latest technologies and becoming even more successful.

Despite the UK's well-documented economic problems, Mitas Tyres has increased the scale of its business significantly during the last two years, bucking the industry trend of stagnant or falling sales experienced by many competitors. Year-on-year sales were up 29 per cent during the last 12 months as customers increasingly recognise the quality, value and choice offered by the Mitas, Continental and Cultor ranges. These products are specified by world-class manufacturers of agricultural and construction machinery including JCB, Massey Ferguson, CNH, Terex, John Deere and Claas, while also enjoying a rapid increase in popularity in the replacement market.

“We are a vibrant, dynamic, service-driven company with a clear commercial strategy, a ‘can-do’ attitude, excellent technical resources and a willingness to go after new customers,” explains managing director Jon Ward. “We have developed an excellent range of products, introduced new sizes and tread patterns to meet demand and developed a customer-focused corporate team to deliver a high level of support. Once customers have tried the products they have no hesitation in returning to the brand.”

Responding to customers' requirements has been a key factor in helping Mitas secure new

business in the competitive environment. The fact that the company has been able to offer an excellent package of product and commercial benefits has helped to drive annual turnover from £11 million in 2009 to an anticipated £20 million during the current financial year. A significant proportion of that growth has been achieved in the last 12 months and they are expecting more to come.

Customer service has also been at the heart of B.A. Bush's business, ever since Benjamin Arthur 'Benny' Bush laid the foundations when he opened a cycle shop in New Bolingbroke, Lincolnshire. Shortly before World War II he responded to growing public demand by adding pneumatic car tyres to his established cycle-tyre business and after hostilities ceased became a recognised tyre dealer. By 1947 the business was fitting tyres to all types of vehicles and by 1962 had grown so much that it had to move its operational base to the current site in Horncastle.

Now employing more than 150 people, B.A. Bush remains a family-owned concern under the direction of the founder's grandson, Nigel Bush. Despite employing the latest technology, old-fashioned values remain at the heart of the company's trading ethos. It instils in staff the importance of honesty, correctness and commitment, believes strongly in promoting from within, trains staff to their fullest potential and is always on the look-out for possible routes for expansion, either through acquisition or developing from scratch

Four years ago B.A. Bush operated 12 branches, now it has 17, many of which are recognised as amongst the finest custom-built independent facilities in Europe, winning many retail awards and accreditations. Having earned their reputation as Lincolnshire's and East Yorkshire's leading independent tyre specialist, Bush Tyres, which is now the 14th largest tyre dealer in the UK, is aiming to set standards that are hard for competitors to follow. Whether offering private motorists access to the very latest technology, providing 24-hour support to keep commercial vehicles rolling or keeping the wheels of farm machinery turning, the business is proud of its 'quality at all costs' philosophy.

Bush Tyres stocks over 75,000 car, van and 4x4 tyres and keeps over 10,000 commercial tyres in stock. The company was the first tyre distributor in the UK to be awarded BS5750 by BSI, all of its retail sites are now ISO 9001 certified and can also boast winning the Tyre Industry Council Training Award HC754.

Partnership is mutually beneficial

B.A. Bush cites its close relationship with Mitas Tyres as a key reason for its continuing success: "The East of England is a major area for sales of agricultural tyres and has been a cornerstone of our business since we started," Nigel Bush explains. "In the 1960s we became one of the first distributors to import Kleber radial tyres into the UK and were heavily involved in promoting/selling the radial concept in agriculture, adding the Goodyear radial product, which was a reliable, tyre which performed well. Mitas has evolved over the last few years, increasing in prominence, with tyres to specifically meet our own business needs and customers' requirements.

"When Mitas Tyres first came to see us its product range wasn't the best on the market but it was an 'up and coming' player and willing to listen to what we had to say. The tyre industry is basically a people business and the fact that we get on well with the people at Mitas Tyres has been invaluable, which is largely why the relationship has gone from strength to strength.

“The tyre business has changed a great deal over the last few years at every level and specialism has become much more important. The market for agricultural tyres provides a very good example of this, because equipment has increased massively in size and complexity, the amount of labour on farms has declined markedly during that time and the periods of peak workload periods in the farming calendar have become much shorter and more intense. However, at a time when tyre performance, reliability and back-up service have become much more critical to the customer, the business of supplying agricultural tyres has become much more difficult. Agriculture is a very seasonal business, with most of the demand coming during just a few weeks of the year, namely just before the start of harvest in July and extending into the autumn when fields are cultivated ready for the following season’s crops to be drilled.

“With most distributors being unwilling to justify the investment that is required to service a sector that is so specialised less of them are selling agricultural tyres. Of those that continue to service the agricultural sector, because of the seasonality, the volume of business does not warrant carrying stock, so they order on an ‘as needed’ basis from a third party, often purely on the basis of low price, with the result that a lot of customers are being supplied with lower-quality, non-premium tyres and invoiced for a particular size rather than a specific brand.

“Several years ago it became apparent to us that to be a significant player in the agricultural market we would have to have a year-round business for this type of tyre. It was also obvious that this could not be achieved just by selling replacement tyres to farmers. The strategy which we decided to pursue was to build on the specialist knowledge we already had within the business to provide an even better service to the agricultural industry and focus on meeting the needs of smaller agricultural equipment manufacturers, a specialist sector that tyre manufacturers themselves were not geared up to handle.”