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AN EXAMPLE OF ITALIAN BUSINESS EXCELLENCE TO LOOK TO THE FUTURE WITH OPTIMISM.

Interview with Antonello and Ezio Sciola, owners of MAP S.p.A., Osio Sotto (Bergamo, Italy).

One cannot help but be impressed and fascinated when listening to the history of this company in business for over 110 years, especially when you have the chance to visit their three production plants, all modernly equipped and organized. The three units are located within the same area, about 500 meters apart. Their production technologies are the best example of how MAP has been able to anticipate trends, to innovate and keep its success in the market.

Nowadays MAP employs about 140 people to make materials and finished components aesthetic and functional for coverings, acoustic and thermal insulation, for a wide variety of market sectors. The company's quality management system is certified, allowing them to perform intensive research and development and to respond to more and more complex customer requests, including CAD design services.

SAIP: Your Company's strength undoubtedly lies in your Vision and strategies to implement it: that is, being different through a variety of original and unique products, intrinsic elements of your innovation and quality, and through clear objectives, as well as considerable manufacturing capabilities. Where did these winning ideas come from? Or better, how did your long history of success begin?

Antonello Sciola: "It's a family history that began with our great-grandparents: they were saddlers and produced high-quality leather harnesses and saddles for horses and other working animals.
Even then the laboratory thrived on

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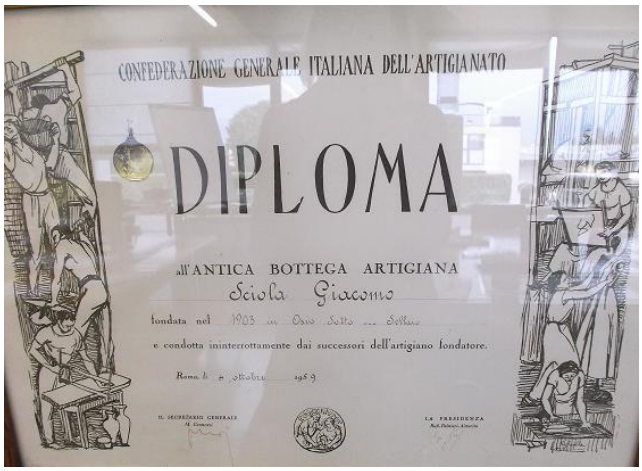

its quality and workmanship, and was the highest rated in the area.

The business was carried on by our grandparents and later my father and his brothers. In the meanwhile, the production started to diversify, going from schoolbags to umbrella handles and other products**.** In 1960, following the death of my father, who was the elder brother, the management of the company passed to my mother and my uncle Carlo, who managed the company until the early '70s, when my cousin Ezio and I took over the business within two years of each other".

Ezio Sciola: "Antonello and I grew up together, we are like brothers and this has always been on of our strengths: he has contributed significantly to the management of the company, helping us to make important decisions and to overcome moments of crisis. Being able to share fears, doubts and efforts has allowed us to keep enough confidence and strength to go on".

Antonello Sciola: "Together we have made significant strategic decisions. We switched from the production of saddles and umbrella handles to increasingly complex and larger products.
The need for more room for appropriate production facilities for the desired product type and quality led us to our first major investment - the purchase of a new plant - and to moving our company from the town center to the industrial area. It was 1979, MAP had 20 employees and had 1500 square meters of indoor space".

SAIP : Can we consider this decision the real turning point?

Antonello Sciola: "Actually in the history of MAP there have been several turning points, but that one definitely marked the beginning of a new course: MAP made the choice to dedicate its research and development to complete solutions for tractor cabs. The market lacked any similar offer, and we realized that we wanted to stand out and offer something unique, different from all the rest. So we have started to produce tractors seats, sanctioning an important partnership

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with SAME (1985), producing security systems, such as roofs coating and roll-bars, as well as studying innovative solutions for security, soundproofing, comfort, etc.".

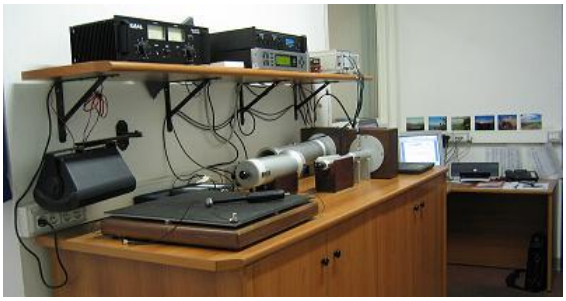
Ezio Sciola : "Then we introduced the first molding machines and, shortly later, dosing machines for polyurethane foam. The goal was, then as now, to provide the "body shops" everything they needed to produce the entire cab with full autonomy: the project, the metal, plastic and fabric parts, all the equipment necessary for the safety and sound proofing of the cabin".

Antonello Sciola: "We had a well defined goal and strategy: we aimed to evolve in a total sense, and to show the market a complete, unparalleled and absolutely competitive offer. Customers want complete and innovative solutions: MAP sensed it from the outset and therefore has invested heavily in the research and development of innovation strategies, diversifying the possible paths depending on the field to explore".

SAIP: It is clear, visiting your plants, that the technology you have available is cuttin-edge and state-of-the-art; in particular we were struck by the equipment and the facility dedicated to the research and development of insulation and sound absorbing materials: your semi anechoic chamber is undoubtedly an extremely advanced tool that allows a variety of non-typical precision test.

Antonello Sciola: "The laboratory of acoustics and vibrations is our pride and joy. It was a fundamental achievement and we are very pleased with the results that we get through this apparatus.
It constantly works on research and tests new materials, systems and solutions to improve quality and reduce costs of problems related to noise, either with airborne or structural source and transmission.

Moreover, thanks to this system we are able to offer customers a consultancy service to experimentally validate their design".



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SAIP: Nowadays MAP is the undisputed leader in providing cabin interiors: almost the entire European production is yours. Are there any other areas, parallel to this, you are currently keeping an eye on?

Antonello Sciola : "We are growing very well in the field of external bodies for construction equipment, such as platforms, excavators, combine harvesters, etc.. In fact we have just produced one of the biggest molds ever put into production by MAP: 4 x 2 meters. It's a very interesting field for us, and not just for security. As a matter of fact in recent years we have been witnessing a growing focus on design solutions. In other words, there is a tendency to satisfy not only the traditional parameters of performances of use, but also those related to personal taste and aesthetics".

SAIP: Are you talking about a trend that includes bodywork and interiors created by famous fashion designers?

Antonello Sciola: "Giugiaro and Pininfarina, to mention only some of the most famous automobile designers, are personally involved in the design and study of the bodies of these vehicles that today require more rounded shapes than ever, all in order to satisfy a completely new need for aesthetics. This trend implies a total rethinking of the technology that is required to produce not only the usual squared pieces but also pieces that present particular roundness, with a significant increase in the level of sophistication. MAP has developed solutions able to satisfy the needs of this trend, with an exclusive technology and competitive costs".

SAIP: The right technology at the right time. There is not just good timing in your choices.

Ezio Sciola : "We know the market and we have learned to grasp and foresee its developments. All our strengths lie on analysis, programming, and, of course, timing. MAP also

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goes directly into the design of the product you wish to obtain. To create it and give it the innovative features you want, we perform a substantial amount of targeted tests that often require several months. For example, the research project on more efficient materials for soundproofing mats required more than a year. As far as we are concerned, the results do not come about by chance".

SAIP : What are your main markets?

Antonello Sciola: "Italy in the first place, where, in spite of everything, there is always a lot of attention to details. The Italian market consists mainly of pieces for tractors cabs and digger machines. 90% of sales is then destined to foreign markets. Approximately 40% of our income comes from exports to European countries, such as England, Germany, France and Austria. We have some interesting projects open to the Far East and the United States".

SAIP : How do you see the economic situation in Italy? Do you still believe in active support of the government towards private societies despite the total inaction of the last twenty years?

Antonello Sciola: "I was terrified by the idea that foreigner entrepeneurs, following the economic crisis and the events of our political class, could no longer see Italy as a country with firm credibility and able to offer competitive advantages, thus cutting off contacts, preferring other suppliers. In fact, I have found that clients, and in general those who turn to us, have kept their esteem and confidence in the skills and work policies of small and medium-sized Italian manufacturing companies. Foreign customers continued to prefer MAP and Italy, in several cases, and to assign us a considerable amount of work to carry out".

Ezio Sciola: "We are still recognized for our ability to "create" solutions: our manufacturing skills and our technology solutions are second to none. We confirm our esteem for the skills of others, but we take from our stakeholders that Italians are confirmed to have an edge from different points of view: accuracy, high skills in making highly sophisticated products work, competitive ideas. Despite the lack of full support from the government we are still full of resources".

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SAIP : It is no coincidence that your main strategic suppliers are Italian; How important was and still is today the contribution of the supplier in the success of your strategies?

Antonello Sciola: "The suppliers have been and still are crucial: they need to provide us with a product and a service of excellent quality at a competitive price, as well as have an innate aptitude to be proactive and flexible: they must know how to listen. Foreign suppliers have often heavy structures, long response times and high costs. We need dynamic partners who, like us, are able to meet the challenges and to be there when needed."

SAIP : How did you discover SAIP and why did you choose us?

Giancarlo Chiesa – Head of Research Development and Maintenance: "We approached the polyurethane world as absolute newbies about 30 years ago, when we bought an old second-hand foaming machine. We needed to know how to replace the pieces and restart the system. I contacted SAIP, and they immediately gave us their complete support. That day good chemistry and fruitful collaboration were born. For any special requests, new projects and challenges MAP has always been able to turn to and rely on SAIP's contribution."

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SAIP: Walter Pozzi, owner of SAIP, often emphasizes that the beauty of working with MAP lies in doing new things together.

Antonello Sciola: "MAP and SAIP are both enterprising organizations. Projects such as "Foam-loaded Products" or "High-pressure painting and dosing of colour pastes" almost seemed possible to achieve on paper. Instead, thanks to the technical skills and the versatility of SAIP, they have been developed with considerable success. At the Agritechnica exhibition in Hanover MAP products, made thanks to SAIP's plants, received a more than positive feedback and good requests: we have also received orders for soft-material dashboards from SAME. "

Giancarlo Chiesa : "MAP products, from the new soundproofing materials to cabin interiors or exteriors, always require a specific technology to be realized, due to its innovative character. SAIP joins MAP in the study and development of the optimal solution: it accepts and steadily wins its own challenges. They have always had time to offer us their best help."

SAIP: What are your main future projects in light of the Italian and global economic situation?

Antonello Sciola: "Despite the uncertainty that has for all too long oppressed and depressed Italy and Europe, we have reasons to be optimistic and confident in the future: the orders that we have acquired to date will see us busy for the next 3-4 years; according to the current agreements and what is shaping up we will even have to adquire larger spaces to meet the requirements. We're almost incredulous, considering the current situation of the country, but the facts speak for themselves. In 2014 we will continue the studies of the projects that we have underway, e.g. in the marine industry, where we have made significant investments in research, specific projects, certificates, smoke test, acoustic testing; we shall keep an active research on these areas, as well as others on which we are still working on. We will make other investments for new systems and will work hard on the study of decorative solutions for cabin interiors: for example, we currently working on a plant for the decoration of faux carbon dashboards. "

SAIP: It almost looks as if the recent crisis has not touched your company...

Antonello Sciola : "On the contrary, the crisis has deeply touched the entire company, it has been personally experienced by me and my cousin and all the staff. It has been a truly difficult period: in 2007 we had just made significant investments, including the purchase of the new building, and suddenly the sales collapsed. For a long time the situation showed no signs of

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recovery, and the fear that everything was going up in smoke and that many families could find themselves without income has been great. We kept our nerve and fortunately recovered little by little, and now we are back to being competitive. The crisis has been hard but, somehow,it has also brought out the best of us."

Ezio Sciola: "We have always worked hard and with professionalism. Our customers know this and keep on choosing us. Therefore today we are back to being confident in what the future may hold."

The End

About Saip Equipment – Saip is an innovation and full-quality driven equipment designer and manufacturer for the polyurethane industry. Saip is committed to always developing innovative solutions for its customers' sustainable business success, and profitable growth. Established in 1978 and headquartered in Inverigo (Como, Italy), Saip counts on around 50 trained and highly qualified committed employees leveraging a network of commercial branches and affiliated companies around the world. Saip provides its customers with exclusive technical assistance focused on their needs. Saip has developed in the years various kinds of equipment for its sectors of activity including the CONTITECH: continuous lines for sandwich panels, the DITECH: discontinuous lines for sandwich panels; REFTECH: complete foaming lines for commercial and domestic refrigeration industry; SAIPTECH: polyurethane technical applications and custom made solutions, PIPETECH: for pipes insulation. The Saip product offering includes also a wide range of competitive and state-of-the-art dispensing machines: high pressure dosing machines, low pressure dosing machines and elastomers casting machines. Saip provides its customers with the highest levels of project-team specialization, ensuring continuity in relationships.
More at: ***www.saipequipment.it***