

GETTING into Gear

By focusing on one key product, Ata Gears is able to provide consistent high quality and service various industry sectors with unparalleled professionalism and expertise.

Images courtesy of Jonathan Melartin and Ata Gears

Ata Gears was founded in 1937 and specialises in the design, production, and sales of customised spiral bevel gears. From its headquarters in Tampere, Finland, the company delivers high-quality gears to the marine, vehicle, and heavy-engineering industries across the globe.

Antti Kontiainen, President of Ata Gears, stepped into his role three years ago, but has worked with industrial machinery for his entire career. He caught up with *The CEO Magazine* to discuss the value of close working relationships and the bright future that lies ahead for Ata Gears.

The CEO Magazine: Can you give our readers an overview of your professional background leading up to and including your current position?

Antti: I have a Master of Science degree and my first working place

was at Wärtsilä Diesel. Then I continued on to Metso Paper, which produced paper machines, and also spent a year and a half in the USA with Metso Paper. I came back to Finland and was managing director for AK-Tehdas. Later, I was working in Rautaruukki, a Finnish steel company and, after that, I came to Ata Gears. I have been working in the Finnish metal industry all my working life, in both big and small corporations.

Throughout your time with the organisation, what have been the greatest challenges you've faced?

In a way, I would say that we've been quite lucky in our bevel-gear business since we're still in quite a good position where we can develop and we can invest, and that's very positive for this type of industry. One thing that we've been really focused on is better overall service and what this service means for our customers.

As customer service is a key element of your organisation, how do you work with customers to develop products and services that suit their needs?

Because we are a very technical company and our products are very high-tech components, we take a close partnership approach. We have a wide range of people that are in contact with our customers. Our engineers are also in contact with our customers, so we can maintain a very deep cooperation with our partnership customers. This is how we can help customers' own products operate better in their applications.

Can you elaborate on how your company develops the products and services it offers with its customers in mind?

We specialise in bevel gears, so we especially help our customers with their bevel-gear applications, including the design and know-how, so that they can get the most >

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- Antti Kontiainen



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out of the products. One key element is that we have a very professional and experienced engineering team that helps customers with their engineering challenges. Another way we work with them is by improving our services. We like to keep our promises, from which we have developed quite a successful on-time delivery rate. And that's also itself one service for our customers. What we promise, we keep. Some companies have a service part business, but that's not our case because we are manufacturing components only for OEMs [original equipment manufacturers].

What would you say are the key values that define Ata Gears?

We are very focused on one product and we conduct business globally, so the majority of customers are outside of Finland. Our vision is to be the best in our niche area, and we're working on it. We train our people and

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develop our processes all the time and we also invest very heavily in our development.

How do you align your staff to these core values and the overall company vision?

This is a family-owned business and this year Ata will be 77 years old. One value is that we are very open and honest, which is a very Nordic-European value. We take care of our customers as well as our own employees. Our vision is

that we want to be the world's best bevel-gear manufacturer and the best in engineering services.

How does Ata Gears collaborate with its key suppliers and other partners to ensure ongoing success?

It's actually quite similar as with the customers, with whom we have very longstanding relationships, and the same applies to our suppliers. We like to find good partners and we like

to have long relationships so there is true cooperation between us and our customers, as well as with our suppliers.

What would you say are the main ways that your key suppliers have helped you be successful?

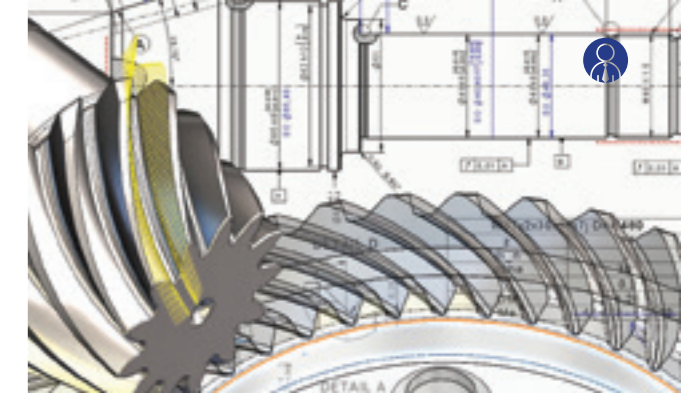
In our business, suppliers' high-level technical competence matters, because from our customers' point of view, reliability is number one. The materials need to be perfect without any kind of compromises. Normally, forging is the base material for bevel gears. We use only the highest quality materials that our suppliers provide. We also use turning and machining subcontractors to help us. ATA needs to have top-notch quality partners to help us reach the high-quality standards that we strive for here.

From when the business was first established to where it is now, how has the philosophy of running the business changed over the years?

In the beginning, there were several products in our production line. Because our business was established 77 years ago, there were many products that people and industry needed in everyday life. Over the years, there has been wisdom in the ownership, where they have dropped the rest of the products but left the core of this business, which are bevel gears. We're still developing our products, but we've found what we want to focus on.

As a combination of being a family business and wanting to be a successful business, what is your personal philosophy of how the business should be run?

My personal feeling is that we always need to develop. We must invest in our machinery and we need to develop our people to be successful as a company. If we forget these two things, then we won't be the best. This is actually the main difference in these types of family businesses, in that there is a great deal of collaboration so things can be done in a shorter



time and the company is more agile. Family businesses make it much easier for innovation and investments, which is a key element in our business.

Looking ahead, what will you be doing in terms of developing your people and your business further?

It seems to me that spiral bevel gears are quite a simple product, but there's still room for improvement. We've been investing in heat treatment and that's important in being able to provide high quality. We will take some other steps, aside from the heat treatment, to build from the product itself. So, we'll go deeper in the R&D side because there is a space for improvement even though the product has been on the market for hundreds of years. So we're still looking at and investing in new technology.

What does the future hold for Ata Gears?

We think the future is bright for us. Our main business areas are in marine and industrial applications and we think that this business will continue to exist in the future, so we see that there will still be a need for our products. There is still room for this type of traditional mechanical component in the future. We just need to develop ourselves so that our customers are happy.

You've mentioned your philosophy with regard to the people that work with you. What has been the feedback that you've received from them in terms of how they're part of the success of Ata Gears?

I think this is the one side of the family business model that is very



important. The company has taken good care of our people, and it is reflected back with our people taking care of the company. The feedback I've received is very positive: We have highly skilled people with a very close affiliation to our company. They staff understand that they also need to share with the company. It's not just what the company can do for them, but it should go both ways. I think we've got very good personnel here at Ata and the people can help us move towards the future.

In conclusion, what would be the key message that you would like to convey regarding Ata Gears and the future ahead?

I think the key element is that we have very longstanding relationships with our customers. Our longest relationship has been going on for something like 50 years, so exceptionally long. Staying in touch with our suppliers is something that is based on these very longstanding relationships also, and we keep these close partnerships with suppliers, as well as customers. This is how we would like to continue, because we understand that our product has an essential role in our customers' applications. The quality of our products is number one. Producing only high-quality products is the basis for our reputation and that is what we need to continue doing in the future. •

Continual success is when trust and quality come together

Dirostahl stands for tradition and progress in the art of forging. The company covers the entire range of open die forgings for shipbuilding, energy companies, large-scale mechanical engineering, and the printing industry.

The pleasant and trustful business relationship between Ata Gears Oy and Dirostahl is deeply rooted in the history of both companies. Hot rolled rings, punched discs, and shafts are forged of alloyed 'case-hardened steels' and 'quenched and

tempered steels' which Ata Gears Oy needs especially for marine transmission gears and industrial gears. Dirostahl supplies in accordance with specifications of official inspection authorities and ship classification companies.

