

Quality Cable SOLUTIONS

INTERKAB is the leading service organisation in the management and supply of electrical cables and associated accessories.

Images by Ray Smith

Since 2002, the company, which operates under the brand name INTERKAB (International Cable Management Ltd) has been serving the worldwide oil and gas, petrochemical, power generation, shipbuilding, and renewable energy industries. The business is project-focused, supporting major operators and EPC contractors with their requirements for any combination of standard, non-standard, or specification cables. Its mission is simple—to work in partnership with clients, continually adding value to their operation, both directly through minimising the costs of cables and indirectly by streamlining their individual procurement and expediting processes.

INTERKAB was founded by the late Mike Knox as a privately

owned and operated business. Brian Smith was asked in November 2014 to take over the position of managing director shortly before Mike passed away in December 2014.

“It was a proud moment when I was asked by Mike to step up to being managing director,” Brian says. “I consider it a privilege to be trusted to run a family business; however, it does help that the family are all very knowledgeable about the cable industry, having lived through it with Mike for the past 30 to 40 years, both with INTERKAB and his previous companies within the cable industry. I’ve also got the knowledge and expertise of his son Chris who co-founded INTERKAB and holds the position of non-executive director. He’s a valuable source of knowledge and I have a relationship where I can speak to

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the family members on a regular basis. It’s evident that Mike’s passion for the industry has rubbed off on them.

“Mike had a thirst for research and possessed extensive knowledge of both the cable industry and its role within the oil and gas sector. He understood the often complex interconnecting links between operators in that sector and the projects they were working on. Accordingly, he was able to understand their requirements and help make the link between identifying potential new customer opportunities and, as a result, which suppliers would be best placed to support them.”

Brian has a lot of respect for the company’s founder and says he learned a great deal from him. “Sadly, I only had the opportunity to work for him for about two years >



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but, even in that short time, the knowledge and experience he passed on was invaluable. One of the key principles he taught me was that, by putting in place a structure whereby individuals could maximise their potential, this also maximised the chances of commercial success for the company.”

Brian’s professional career started at the age of 16 when he left school and started work at a small Aberdeen-based accountancy office. From there he went to college for a year before returning to office work. In 1981, he took on his first proper job within the oil and gas sector but when the industry crashed in 1983 he was made redundant. Fortunately, he had just completed one of the early mid-sized computer installations and, as he started to look for new opportunities, this resulted in him working in various roles throughout the 80s for companies which had just introduced or were required to install a computerised accounting system.

Brian was able to gain an in-depth knowledge on how computerised accounting systems worked and the benefits they could bring within various business models and use this to his advantage in future pursuits. Throughout the 80s and 90s, he worked in various accounting and computing roles before starting his own business in the window-blind sector. “You tend to learn a lot when you run your own business and invest your own money,” he notes. “You see your decisions either paying off, or not, as the case may be. You always have a different experience when you’re doing it with your own money, but it was a good one for me.”

In 2001, Brian returned to accountancy and, supported by his employer at the time, decided to study for a masters degree in business administration, graduating with distinction in 2006—one of only 10 people to do so since the course’s inception. He was one of four in his class that year to achieve those marks.

“I think that probably helped because there was a good cohort of us,” he says. “I was surrounded by people a lot wiser than myself and some of it must have rubbed off.”

After graduation, the company he was working for sold parts of its operations to Electro-Motive Diesel Ltd, a subsidiary of an American business that had been acquired from General Motors by private equity investors. “I suppose that was really one of the breaks in my career,” Brian notes. “It certainly provided a shot in the arm, so to speak.”

“After 12 months with the new group, I was offered the opportunity to take up a role as international CFO to work alongside the senior vice-president for overseas operations. At this point in time, the company won a contract in South Africa to manufacture 50 ‘like new’ locomotives. This consumed my time for about two years and I found it an enriching experience. I managed

to see the production process from start to finish and gained considerable industry insight.”

In 2009, Brian returned full-time to the UK and was promoted to finance director of Electro-Motive Diesel Ltd before leaving to join the team at INTERKAB. Brian’s leadership style takes on a collaborative approach—pulling people in the right direction for the common good. He makes it a priority to help his staff reach their own potential and understands the importance of effective communication. Brian believes INTERKAB’s unique selling point is the expertise of its personnel and so he does what he can to support and nurture their needs.

“Our employees possess extensive knowledge of the products on offer and combine this with a passion for sourcing the most appropriate solution for our customers. Even clients who are engineers are not always experts in cabling, so our job is to decipher what they are asking for and ensure that’s what they get.

“We work with a range of manufacturing partners, depending on what type of cable is required, and we will match the customer’s requirements as regards specification, quality, delivery, and price. I think that’s what comes across to our customers—it’s the level of service we provide which is a key factor in their decision to come to us as opposed to a competitor. We’re not always the cheapest on the market but we consider ourselves to be a service company and we liaise with clients from the developmental stages of projects through to their conclusion and can assist them in specifying what is required long before there’s a potential order on the table.”

INTERKAB believes in the training and development of staff and this extends to ensuring supply-chain excellence. “Everybody involved in the process understands the products on offer, the service we provide, who our competitors are, and the commercial necessity in offering



the most appropriate option for each individual customer.

“We work very closely with our supply chain and always try to ensure that we do a site visit before we use any new manufacturers. We carefully survey all our suppliers under our ISO 9001 certification process and we not only evaluate their capabilities in terms of what they produce but also in terms of quality and their health and safety record. Once we’ve built a relationship, we tend to work with our suppliers for the long term. The stronger the bond, the more we can achieve for the ultimate end user of the product.”

Looking forward, Brian is striving to ensure INTERKAB is the first choice for anyone looking to purchase electrical cable and its associated accessories. He wants to grow the company’s market share and actively seek opportunities for expansion of its product range.

“It will be impossible to replace a person like Mike, but I believe we can build on his legacy and create a company that we can be proud of,” Brian concludes. “It will take a lot of hard work but with the family’s undoubted commitment to the future and the skill and expertise of the team I believe this can be achieved.” •



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Address: Via De Gasperi 82 20864
Agrate Brianza (MB) Italy

Tel +39 039 653251
Fax +39 039 652327

