

FLO KEEPS CUSTOMERS MOVING *with* *innovative solutions*



by Steve Pecar

FLO

Components Ltd. has been making life easier for business owners across Ontario and Manitoba for more than 40 years by keeping machines up and running and, as their slogan says, taking away customers' pain. The Mississauga-based company is an automatic greasing systems specialist and a leading supplier of total lube solutions to major manufacturers and truck and heavy equipment users.

While FLO has been designing, assembling, and installing high-quality lubrication systems and providing solutions for all types of manual greasing, automatic lubrication and fluid handling applications for more than four decades, the operators of the company believe there is still plenty of opportunity for innovation and success in this highly competitive market.

"We've been in this business for a long time and we have had a lot of success, but I think there is still room for growth and that is the direction we are headed," says Vice-President Mike Deckert. "We want to get bigger and better."

The family-owned and operated business was launched in 1977 by Gordon Deckert who had been a long-time salesman for Lincoln Industrial, a manufacturer of fluid control systems.

As they say in the business, "if things aren't lubricated, things don't move," and the senior Deckert understood this philosophy all too well. With his years of experience to guide him and a touch of entrepreneurial spirit, he seized the opportunity to branch out when he recognized there was not only a market for lubrication equipment, but for customizing solutions for specific tasks and machinery.

Using an industrial unit in Cambridge as a base, FLO started off small, and over time set up locations in Stoney Creek, Burlington and Mississauga. Along the way, Gordon's sons, first Chris and then Mike, joined the business. By the late 1980s, Chris had become president and Mike vice-president. "My brother and I started to take over the business from our father at that time," Mike Deckert explains. "It was great »





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One of the moves in that direction was the purchase in 2000 of their own building in Mississauga. The 10,000 square foot space has been the company's anchor and houses its entire operation of design, assembly, service, sales and administration with plenty of area to expand.

In a highly competitive market, Deckert says the key to FLO's success has been not only to serve industry by providing product, but also by making sure it's serviced in a way that suits the specific needs of the customer. “It's not just about the product, it's about finding solutions,” he stresses. “That's what we focus on and that's what we do best for our customers. We provide solutions to whatever their needs are when it comes to lubrication and fluid-handling applications. We solve problems. That's what we mean by saying we take away customers' pain.”

Deckert points out that if you can provide solutions to improve operating efficiencies, it means profitability to the customer. “That's what we strive for – lubrication solutions that increase productivity, health and safety, and reduce downtime.”

The markets FLO serve include industrial, which is made up of manufacturing plants, and those companies that use heavy equipment or “yellow goods” – construction and earth moving or quarrying machines. That heavy equipment connection is where FLO fits in with OAPC. As associate members, many of FLO's customers for product and service include those in the asphalt paving industry. As well as on-the-road machinery,

Deckert says that 95 per cent of the grease points at asphalt plants are still manually lubricated and always in need of FLO products and solutions as the technology changes.

Smaller businesses, such as lube shops or any operation that needs grease fittings, automatic lubrication systems, or garage or fluid handling inventory control systems, are also in the market for FLO systems. As well, the company has its own distribution network across Ontario and Manitoba.

According to Deckert, what makes FLO special is the versatility it provides. While not a manufacturer, FLO designs product solutions that are assembled using quality components from a variety of companies. As well as still having a strong connection to Lincoln, other suppliers include SKF, RPM, Perma, Alemite and Anderol.

“We put together solutions based on components from a variety of manufacturers,” says Deckert. “Based on our experience and knowledge, this means we can provide the best solution possible. Ultimately, what our customers receive is a FLO system that will help them to do their job and achieve their goals.”

Gabriel Lopez, FLO's marketing specialist, says that research and development has always played a big part in the company's growth and it is becoming increasingly more important. Lopez says things change rapidly in their business, from the products that come from their suppliers, to the needs requested by their clients. As a result, the R&D aspect keeps FLO sharp and on the leading edge and provides the opportunity for innovation. For instance, R&D has been needed for new advancements in low



Flo's Gabriel Lopez demonstrates the Small Machine Luber, a compact yet powerful automatic grease system for compact equipment that is designed to use standard off-the-shelf industry grease cartridges.



Solar powered stationary or wayside rail lubrication systems lower noise emission and reduce wear on rails, switches and wheels. This controller can transmit and receive system information on any hand-held device.

cost lubrication systems for skid steers, mini backhoes and telehandlers. "As our customers change and adapt, we change and adapt too," says Lopez.

One way FLO has adapted is with the development of wireless monitoring. A system FLO has designed and developed, it uses the latest technology on equipment that will send out a text alert or email if there is a problem. "If there is a system failure, or if more grease is needed in the reservoir, or whatever is going on, our system will let you know," Lopez says.

Another innovation FLO is proud of is QuickFit, a system that allows for a fast effective way to change oil, transmission and hydraulic fluids in a fleet. "Again, it comes down to efficiency," says Deckert. "Downtime, whether it is routine maintenance or a system failure, costs an employer money. Our solutions work to eliminate those problems to keep machines up and running."

Health and safety issues are at the forefront of most industries today and as such, FLO must respond. Deckert says that along with keeping machinery running, it also has to be done safely, and a lot of work and research goes into developing solutions with that in mind. The QuickFit system is one that fits into this category.

FLO also spends a lot of time on training, not just for the solutions that are supplied, but also for lubrication techniques and practices in general. Training courses are taught by industry experts and are geared to help companies reap the benefits of better lubrication procedures and practices. The training is done either at site, offsite in conference halls, or in FLO's Mississauga location, and courses can be directed to specific concerns and applications as they apply to each customer. »



To continue to grow, FLO is working to strengthen its reputation as the go-to company as far as lubrication systems go. "There are a lot of suppliers out there, a lot of competition, so every day we work to keep ahead of them and do the things that make us valuable to our customers," Lopez says. "Ninety per cent of our customers have been with us for over 10 years — it's a metric we track — and I think that says something about our service. We just don't go out there and sell you a system and leave. We work together on whatever issue you have and try to make sure it never happens again."

Lopez says many customers come to FLO looking for help and solutions to solve problems that are unique and need special work. "And that's where we really shine," he says. "If you have a problem, chances are we have worked on something similar before. That is where our R&D comes in; that is where our design experience comes in. We have become a one-stop shop where all you have to do is make that phone call and we will be working on a solution."

From a small company that had just eight people working for them in the 1980s, FLO has now grown to one where there is a staff of 35 working in a permanent location where new systems are constantly being developed.

The approach that takes FLO into the future will be one that not only maintains the knowledge of what has gone before, but one that embraces what is to come, anticipates the trends and new technology, and is ready for it.

"There are many equipment suppliers out there, but that is not what we are," Deckert says. "We do all that, but we are a solutions supplier. We are a problem solver and fixer. Our competition gives you systems, but we give solutions, and that's a big difference. Our name says it all. Go with the FLO. That's what it is all about." ■

Steve Pecar is a Mississauga-based writer, editor and designer.