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Spotlight on...



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Premier Lubrication Specialist Succeeds In Meeting Customers' Needs Better

BY MAREK KRASUSKI

Ask company president Chris Deckert or Marketing Manager Gabriel Lopez about their contributions to FLO Components and expect an answer that is redirected away from specific accomplishments toward general values. At FLO, a lubrication systems provider, success is measured not by individual achievement but by collective effort to meet customers' needs. "This company has a deeply ingrained philosophy of people helping people. Everyone at FLO Components shares the same values of success, principally by reaching out to our clients," says marketing specialist Gabriel Lopez. Like the automated greasing and lubrication systems for which the company has built a stellar reputation, all operations – from front desk service to installations, training seminars, needs assessments, and audits – are performed by employees working in tandem to fulfill the company's promise: To provide total lube solutions to major manufacturers and truck and heavy equipment users in Ontario.

Total lube solutions incorporate multiple levels of service and product choice. The company's complete service packages include the design, assembly, and installation of the highest quality automated systems which incorporate components from industry leaders such as Lincoln, Trico, Perma, and other manufacturers with equally renowned reputations. FLO is also a provider of Petro-Canada lubricants to large lube shops, industrial facilities and trucking companies. As well, it installs hoses, pump reels, bulk tanks and provides a monitoring system that measures

fluid volumes going into each vehicle – ideal for maintenance and tracking purposes.

A brief scan of the company website, www.flocomponents.com, presents an overview of the design and multiple benefits of automated lubrication systems (ALS) for on-road and off-road applications, as well as for industrial and commercial uses. Chief among identified benefits is the increased lifespan of critical bearings, bushings and other wear points. The right lubricant applied at the right time to the right spot ensures that equipment stays on the road longer, downtime periods are fewer, and the intervals between replacement parts are longer – a combination of advantages that translate into higher profits.

The richly-deserved reputation that FLO Components has earned, and sustained, for more than 30 years is reinforced by the effort invested in relationship building, underscored here by Chris Deckert's summary of the company's distinguishing features.

"Over the years we have developed the ability to respond to individual customer requirements. Rather than forcing an off-the-shelf component to fit into a system, we will take the time to tailor and customize parts in order to meet unique application requirements."

In one case the company built rock guards into carting containers to prevent damage to pumps hauled into harsh environments. In another, custom-built timers had to replace standard components on a lubrication system for a client in the mining industry.

These out-of-the-box solutions, typical of FLO Components' operations,

are supported by a mix of human resources and business practices. For example, unlike some competitors locked into exclusive agreements with a single lubrication component manufacturer, FLO uses products from multiple manufacturers, all with worldwide reputations for product quality. Wide product availability enables the company to draw from a broad range of lubricants, as well as lubrication systems, best suited for each client's design and application needs.

Standing alongside access to multiple suppliers in the support of sound business practices is the company's fleet of self-contained and fully-equipped mobile workshops, a service feature unique to the industry. Each mobile unit is furnished with all hardware, including requisite welders, crimpers, torches and supply inventories necessary to perform a complete ALS installation for clients anywhere in the province of Ontario. Within hours, mobile units dispatched from company headquarters in Mississauga or from one of FLO's service representatives can be onsite to install a new system, identify problems, offer maintenance advice, or conduct a lubrication audit. Notes Gabriel Lopez, "These service trucks reinforce our level of commitment to the care of our clients. Currently, we focus only on Ontario because we can service all of our clients in a timely manner."

Though the aforementioned sound business practices may be the vehicle by which FLO Components has established itself as a premier provider of total lube solutions, the company's success, once again, is founded principally on the

people driving these practices day in and day out. All FLO employees have previous customer relations experience. At every stage of interaction, clients can expect a friendly and competent level of service – a characteristic that far exceeds the obligation to serve, says Chris Deckert. "Our employees are not only good at, and used to, dealing with customers. They actually enjoy it. This comes from a visceral understanding that if our customer succeeds, we all succeed."

Success, indeed, attracts success. Witness the level of employee expertise. Customer service reps each have an average of 15 years' experience. ALS installers are either certified millwrights, enrolled in a training program, or carry an equivalent level of experience.

A skill level far above the industry norm enables technicians to look beyond the immediate and reason-out solutions independently without repeated consultations with head office. As Chris Deckert explains, "our real strength is in not only understanding the specifics of a particular ALS system. Having a superior general knowledge of machinery and equipment enables our installers to solve all related problems when they rise."

Technicians and installers with above-average skills, moreover, expertly provide customers with full-scale lubrication audits. Clients may not know the type and extent of their lubrication needs, particularly during expansion phases. Lubrication maintenance requirements change, often through an ad hoc process in which machines are added as required. Over time, the process can become less efficient with multiple add-ons. At



such periods, lubrication audits are advised where technicians can identify the type of machinery that needs lubrication, the best lubrication for intended use, the labelling of products, as well as all other assessments that will aid in the creation of a more streamlined operation system.

FLO Components' reputation has developed through a proven track record in relationship building with its customer base. Indeed, it is not by accident that it continues to serve the lubrication demands of major clients for almost 35 years. The commitment to relationship building, summarized in Gabriel Lopez' revealing statement that the company's philosophy is about people helping people, also extends into the larger community.

FLO Components is the recipient of this year's Minister's Award for Apprenticeship Training, yet another milestone demonstrating corporate commitment. The Award celebrates employers that exhibit leadership in train-

ing apprentices, support the apprenticeship training system, and promote skilled trades. This, the company has consistently done over many years.

Mike Deckert, Vice-President and a 25-year company veteran, has spearheaded training programs for industry representatives through vendor-neutral seminars presented in collaboration with key partners such as The Centre for Skills Development, Conestoga College, Sheridan College and Mohawk College. Industry representatives, including fleet managers and mechanics, regularly attend FLO's multimedia presentations on all aspects of lubrication systems.

Broad product choice, a highly skilled workforce, fully-equipped mobile installation and maintenance units, and customized systems together stand on the one foundation that has made FLO Components a premier leader in the provision of turnkey lubrication solutions: "Meeting Customers' Needs Better." ■

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FLO COMPONENTS LTD

FLO Appoints Territory Sales Manager



pleased to announce the appointment of Glenn Chapman as Territory Sales Manager - GTA.

A Sales and Marketing graduate of Sheridan College, Glenn brings over 10 years experience, developing customer relationships in both inside and outside sales positions in the construction and automotive industries in the GTA. His primary focus will be to increase local availability of technical support to our customers and to build FLO's client base in the greater Toronto area.

Automatic Lubrication Systems specialist FLO Components Ltd. continues to expand its resources to better serve construction, road building, aggregate, trucking, manufacturing and processing companies in the GTA. We are

Commenting on the new appointment, FLO Components VP, Mr. Mike Deckert said; "We believe Glenn will make an excellent addition to our team. His extensive ex-

perience in the mobile market, particularly with dealers, gives him excellent insight and will help to strengthen further the relationships with FLO's GTA clients. His proven track record tells us that his personal approach matches FLO's basic foundation of "Meeting Customers' Needs Better", making him well suited for providing the kind of technical and sales support our customers have come to expect. Glenn will work with our key partners in the industry developing lubrication solutions that address their equipment breakdown-related pain and increase machine uptime and profitability."

For more information contact: www.flocomponents.com. ■

Efficient Operational Maintenance



BY MAREK KRASUSKI

Studies have shown that premature bearing failures are common industry pitfalls; pitfalls that can be easily corrected through the proper and timely application of lubricants. Too much, too little, the wrong type, and the potential for machinery and vehicle failure rises dramatically. The premature wear of surface bodies that deteriorate prematurely from improper lubricant use is estimated to cost approximately 1 to 2 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the United States.

Automated lubrication systems have been part of the landscape for decades – but industry has been slow to embrace its multiple benefits. This reluctance stems from decades ago when the technology was first introduced by manufacturers. Like the early stages of any innovation there were some system failures, resulting in lingering suspicions even long after technical flaws had been eradicated. Critics of ALS also claim that operators who manually grease application points can check for other mechanical problems.

The case for ongoing resistance falters, though, when assessing the many advantages automatic lubrication have over manual methods with so much potential for error. For example, manual lubrication requires extended downtime periods and presents increased risk to technicians who have to climb on, in, and around trucks and machinery to effectively service all lubrication points – a comparatively inefficient, risky and costly method. These systems,

moreover, target only one spot on a bearing. The expectation is that once it begins to move, the grease will spread over the entire surface.

Not so, say Mike Deckert and Gabriel Lopez of the Mississauga-based Flo Components, a greasing systems specialist and leading lubrication supplier. “When you are loading just one spot on a bearing, 75 percent of the applied grease will be squeezed out in the first hour of operation. This dramatically increases the risk of bearing failure, downtime, and costs associated with breakdown.”

Lubricants are most effective when applied in small and measured amounts over short but frequent time intervals, a function easily supplied by automatic lubrication systems. Of the many advantages attached to this method of grease application is the guarantee that all critical components are lubricated regardless of location and accessibility. Automatic lubrication occurs when machinery is in operation, allowing for the distribution of lubricant into all areas. Frequent lubrication disbursements also translate into extended life terms of components. Carefully measured amounts that target bearings means that waste is eliminated, less energy is expended due to less friction on joints, and overall productivity is enhanced.

Most automated lubrication

systems share five major components: a controller or timer pow-

ered by 12 or 24 volts that activates the system, a pump and reservoir that dispenses lubricant into the system, supply lines that connect the pump to metering valves or injectors, metering valves that measure and dispense lubricant to application points, and feed lines that carry lubricant from the metering valves to the application points.

There are at least eight types of automatic lubrication systems. But on-road lubrication systems fall into two general categories: progressive and parallel single line systems. A single line progressive uses lubricant to flow into individual metering valves which deliver grease/oil to multiple lubrication points through feed lines. If any line or bearing is not receiving grease the system shuts down and signals the operator to take corrective action before damage results.

Parallel systems pump lubricant through a single supply line to multiple branches of injectors, each of which operate independently and can be individually adjusted to dispense varying amounts of lubrication to different application points. Only the main line is

monitored, so the system will continue even when a blocked feed line fails to deliver lubricant to a bearing. This may result in bearing loss, but most properly designed systems are equipped with indicator pins to notify the operator of malfunctions.

In choosing an automated lubrication system, Flo Components’ Mike Deckert and Gabriel Lopez encourage buyers to ask a number of questions. A comprehensive checklist covering the essentials can be found on the company website’s Reference Library section. Purchasers are encouraged to pay attention to systems that include pumps with high-pressure, inline, lubricant filters, hose fittings with standard NPT thread, pump reservoirs with revolving paddles that eliminate air bubbles in grease which cause system failure, and high pressure gauges. Gabriel Lopez stresses the importance of gauges which should be an essential component of any automated system.

“Gauges tell the operator if there is a problem with the system. If, in the case of a parallel system, there is air in the sup-

ply line, there will not be enough pressure to cycle the metering valves. The pressure gauge will indicate a problem by the erratic fluctuation of the needle,” he says.

Though critics cite several reasons for their refusal to embrace this automated method which has existed for decades, David Piangerelli, President of Lubrication Technologies, says these complaints stem from a failure to understand how these systems work rather than defects in their design or function. He lists several areas that lead to poor system reliability.

Piangerelli echoes the advice of Gabriel Lopez that pressure gauges should be an integral part of any system that moves grease or oil through injectors, valves and flow meters. He also cautions against allowing reservoirs to be refilled by removing a spin-off lid which increases risk of system contamination, and operating a system with a lack of filters which heighten contamination risk of components downstream as a result of impure lubricants in the reservoir.

Other misleading criticisms, ALS proponents say, include the use of unsuitable lubricants. A heavier-grade grease can result in the malfunctioning of injectors and piston failures in divider valves.

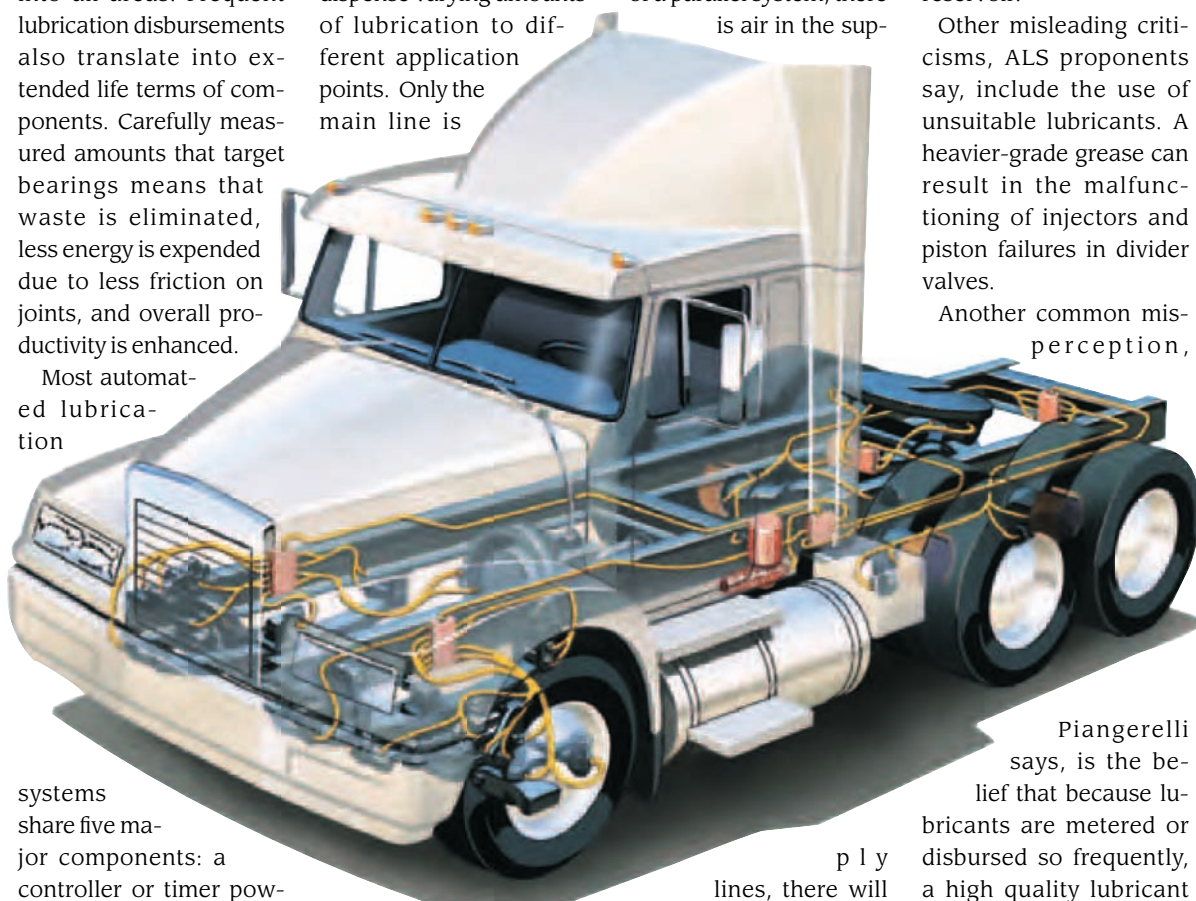
Another common misperception,

can be replaced with a cheaper blend. The risk for adopting this approach can be system seizure and bearing loss due to a lack of load-carrying properties characteristic of inferior or improper lubricants. Lack of load bearing capacity increases metal to metal wear. Flo Components’ Mike Deckert goes one step further by urging users not to mix incompatible lubricants. “Operators need to ensure that the base oil viscosity of different greases is the same before adding one to another. Failure to take this into consideration can lead to problems.”

Key maintenance tips include: Ensuring that pumps are checked at regular intervals for adequate pressure levels, reservoirs have appropriate lubricant levels and periodic refilling undertaken when necessary, tubing and hoses are monitored, as well as signs of leakage and the attachment of components.

The operating principles of automated lubrication haven’t changed over the years, but new technologies are making systems more efficient and easier to operate. New supply and feed lines continue to improve, but the big advancements are in electronics and communications.

Mike Deckert’s snapshot of developments is a telling example: “When we started back in the 80s we had mechanical timers that activated pumps and injected a shot of grease only when a vehicle was thrown into reverse. Today, there are functions capable of monitoring the number and frequency of lubricating cycles, reservoir levels, and reporting capabilities advising when a mechanic is required to troubleshoot the system. Crucial information can be transmitted to cell phones, email browsers, or into spreadsheets,” he says. ■



Piangerelli says, is the belief that because lubricants are metered or disbursed so frequently, a high quality lubricant