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Where Better Begins

Linde Material Handling

30-year milestone for AMHSA



THE AUTOMATED MATERIAL HANDLING SYSTEMS ASSOCIATION CELEBRATES ITS 30TH ANNIVERSARY THIS YEAR. WITH THE HELP OF SOME PAST MEMBERS, AMHSA SECRETARY **DAVE BERRIDGE** REFLECTS ON ITS DEVELOPMENT AND KEY ACHIEVEMENTS.

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The Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, opened the completed M25 and signed a deal

with France to construct the Channel Tunnel. Unemployment was at a post-war high, the GLC was abolished, and the first case of BSE was diagnosed in British cattle. Prince Andrew married Sarah Ferguson, while her namesake, Alex, was appointed manager of Manchester United. Argentina won the World Cup, GCSEs replaced 'O' Levels, 'Big Bang Day' computerised the London Stock Exchange, and 'Neighbours' launched on BBC1. That's 1986 in a nutshell. Oh, and AMHSA was formed.

Although not incorporated until 1990, AMHSA began life in 1986 with only a handful of members – today there are over 50 – and, ironically, the key players were the leading fork lift truck companies.

Greger Lundesjö, formerly MD of BT Systems in the UK, explains: "Roland Green, MD of BT Rolatruc, was one of the instigators, along with Tony Mesquita of Lansing Bagnall and Bob Bischof of Jungheinrich."

The truck companies saw the potential of automation then, as they do today – witness the recent acquisition of Dematic by Kion Group, the parent of Linde and Still. Other key characters in those early days were Matthew Houston of Mannesmann Demag and Jack Hagggett of Haden Technology.

"The forklift firms were flirting with automation, really," says Lundesjö. "They had a very product-oriented view of the world and saw cranes, AGVs and conveyors as items to add to their ranges. They soon found that significant investment was required to carry out the design and integration phases of an automated project."

RAISING AWARENESS

As automation gained a foothold in the handling industry, it became clear that a new trade body was required.

"In the 1980s, there were only associations for bulk handling – such as SHAPA and MHEA – and nothing specifically for unit load handling," explains Graham Watts, AMHSA Secretary from 1999 to 2012. The initial members soon realised that there were specialist handling automation companies already active in the UK and set about recruiting them. There were certainly benefits to be had from taking a united approach.

Says Lundesjö: "An early achievement was raising awareness among clients of the true value of the intangible services – such as system design, simulation and integration – and a general agreement among AMHSA members to identify these costs and charge for them."

UNIFORM STANDARDS

John Malarkey was the first Secretary of AMHSA, holding the post until 1996, when he was succeeded by David Williams. Graham Watts, formerly of the conveyor company and AMHSA member HYTRAC, then took over in 1999 and held the post until 2012. "Graham brought real professionalism to the role and did a fantastic job of bringing uniformity to the sector, especially in terms of health and safety and other standards," says Tony Jauncey, former MD of Welconstruct and AMHSA President from 1993 to 2011.

Educating the UK market on the need for standards was a key task for AMHSA during the 1990s and into the new millennium. Through membership of the British Materials Handling Federation, AMHSA brought the standards of the FEM (the European Materials Handling Federation) to the UK.

"This was important for instilling confidence in buyers," says Steve Knights, former AMHSA President. "Through its specialist committees, the association contributed to the development of standards for areas such as equipment, contracts and accreditation," he adds.

Lundesjö agrees: "In order to

compete on a level playing field, there needed to be clear definitions of factors such as system capacity and availability. The FEM had established many of these and AMHSA helped to develop them and get them understood in the UK."

PROMOTING AUTOMATION

Later, AMHSA turned its attention to promotion, with its website proving a useful resource.

"Although still involved in the development of standards and upholding best practice," says Knights, "there was more emphasis on marketing the concept of logistics automation. AMHSA held the first of its successful symposia in 2007, at which members invited their customers to share their experience of automated handling."

VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

With the flux of member companies over the years, AMHSA has proved a source of continuity as the voice of automated handling. As with all trade associations, there is an underlying dichotomy of unity and competition, but AMHSA has weathered the storms of economic recession (and there have been a few over three decades) so will no doubt survive the fall-out of Brexit.

"Of course, there is always some shadow boxing," admits Knights, "but AMHSA has always been a friendly group."

Lundesjö remembers an amicable moment at one of the very early meetings, held at a hotel near Heathrow: "As we took our seats in the conference room, German-born Bob Bischof found himself sitting directly below a painting of a Wellington bomber and quipped to the assembled members that he didn't feel intimidated; it was quite funny."

We will be celebrating our 30th anniversary with a drinks reception in the AMHSA Pavilion at IMHX immediately after the exhibition closes on the penultimate day, Thursday 15th September, to which everyone is invited. ■

www.amhsa.co.uk

