



Fan Systems moves up the supply chain

An industrial fan manufacturer is aiming to move up the supply chain after completing its Fit For Nuclear journey.

Fan Systems is part of Halifax-based Witt UK, a group of industrial fan specialists owned by Germany's Witt & Sohn but run independently by managing director Martin Booth. The group also includes Alldays Peacock, smoke extraction specialist PSB UK and servicing business Witt & Son. Group turnover is around £12-15 million, with three quarters of production exported.

Fan Systems designs and produces industrial fans weighing up to 15 tonnes for a range of markets. The company has supplied the nuclear industry since 1950, with products in more than 60 stations worldwide. Nuclear provides a good balance to the company's heavy presence in more cyclical markets such as oil and petrochemical, Booth notes. "We've had some hard times, but up to last year it's been an extremely buoyant market which does go against the trend for general manufacturing," he says.

Booth has been driving business improvement across Witt UK since 2008. Successes included reducing lead time at Alldays Peacock from 10 weeks to nine days, beginning in-house production of enclosures and control panels, and securing ISO14001 environmental management certification.

The company embarked on Fit For Nuclear in 2014 after

Booth met F4N advisor Dave Roberts at a Nuclear AMRC event. "I wanted to expand our customer base in nuclear, and I wanted to develop a culture within the organisation that would translate into the fabric of the building as well as its employees, so you know straightaway that this is a quality company," Booth recalls. "That's not an easy project to do."

The initial F4N assessment scored Fan Systems well in areas including quality, health and safety and environmental management, but identified areas for further improvement including business strategy.

Progress on F4N had to take a back seat, however, while the Witt team managed a move from the firm's two ageing factories into a new facility on the other side of Halifax. "We were so cramped that our delivery times were suffering," Booth says. "We needed to remap processes, and we knew if we could trim the delivery times we would get more customers."

Previously occupied by a carpet tile manufacturer, the new site offered 10,000m² of modern open-plan factory space. The move also allowed Fan Systems to introduce new technical capabilities, including CNC machining, laser profiling, advanced welding techniques and a modern R&D testing workshop.



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After officially opening the new factory in October 2015, Booth’s team restarted their F4N journey and were signed off within a few months.

F4N helped drive investment in people and processes alongside the investment in the new factory, says Neil McAlister, European sales manager. **“If we could bring ourselves up to speed for the nuclear market, we can use that as a standard,”** he notes. **“That will filter down and people in other industries can see they’re getting a lot of bang for their buck, and that can help keep us ahead of the competition.”**

Alongside a continuing apprenticeship programme, the firm has invested in training for its 90-strong staff including 5S and lean manufacturing courses for shopfloor workers.

“F4N helped identify what skillsets we were short of and what we needed to address,” says Lee Sinclair, engineering and technical manager. **“It’s not just looking at manufacturing processes – it’s looking at the document side of things, making sure your processes and procedures are watertight and everyone’s following them. It’s about keeping everybody involved and feeling they’re contributing to the business.”**

Fan Systems is now pursuing new opportunities in nuclear new build and decommissioning, and preparing to develop a dedicated workshop for nuclear fabrication.

The firm is also targeting emerging markets such as biomass, waste reclamation and heat transfer in power stations. It is

introducing new products, including an ultra-efficient fan developed by the parent group, and looking at strategic acquisitions.

The business improvements made through F4N and Witt’s other initiatives will help move Fan Systems up the supply chain, Booth says. Moving from its current Tier 3 to a Tier 2 position will allow Fan Systems to work more closely with the end users, and provide a one-stop shop for customers.

“We know what the end user needs, and we get frustrated when things get watered down,” Booth concludes. **“We weren’t in a position to move up the supply chain before, but now we are. It’s one of our major goals.”**

www.fansystems.co.uk
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Fit For Nuclear (F4N) helps UK manufacturers get ready to bid for work in the civil nuclear supply chain.

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Fit For Nuclear


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