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## UK OEMs deserve full support says Mitsubishi Electric

**The UK OEM sector is keen to expand and improve its international competitiveness, and government officials are equally keen as this will help to rebalance the national economy away from an overreliance on financial services. Jon Sumner, OEM Solutions Manager for Mitsubishi Electric says that there are some vital issues to address, for success.**

Back in 2008, when the banks collapsed and many of the City institutions ground to a halt, it became painfully apparent just how dependent Britain was on the financial sector. Almost immediately, manufacturing with machine builders and OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) was called upon to help drive recovery and become the new backbone of the economy.

Naturally, this could not happen overnight; the whole industry could not simply double or quadruple its activity levels. However, there is a new-found respect for engineers and what they do. OEMs are steadily building up their businesses and planning for long-term strategic developments.

One of the key things they are doing is looking increasingly to overseas markets. This can be in the well-established industrialised countries of Western Europe and North America. It can also mean trying to win business in the developing markets of the Far East, Central and Eastern Europe, South America and the Indian subcontinent, where cultural differences and fast changing conditions can prove difficult, but the potential rewards can be great.

Many end-users will want to use a local or national OEM if they can – only selecting an overseas supplier if they offer something the locals cannot. Therefore, for some UK OEMs this means leaving their comfort zone of tried and trusted engineering solutions and re-engineering their designs, using new high-tech systems based on robots, precision motion and high-performance control systems.

Naturally, they need support through this process, a fact that Mitsubishi fully appreciates and has addressed for many years through a dedicated OEM team. The team members are not simply product sales engineers but are well-versed in the application of multiple advanced automation technologies. They are also acutely aware of the extra pressures of satisfying export orders and have many approaches for addressing potential issues.

Our credentials for this are that Mitsubishi Electric are a \$38bn global brand that offers service and support around the world. Importantly, it owns its technologies, right down to the core electronic components, so can guarantee continuity in the medium- and long-term. We also operate a network of partner companies called the e-



# PRESS RELEASE

27.02.2014



Factory Alliance, in which we develop enduring relationships with companies that provide complementary products, services or expertise. We view each OEM as unique and work with them to develop bespoke solutions for individual projects. However, we notice that there are always general trends that several OEMs will be following to a greater or lesser extent, such as the value re-engineering techniques mentioned earlier.

OEMs know that their customers will often ask for 'another machine, just like the last one.' This is fine on an order-by-order basis but over the longer term, opportunities for development and improved productivity are not being realised.

At Mitsubishi, we see it as our job to enthuse OEMs about robotics, motion control and other technologies and to support them as they suggest new possibilities to the end-users. We have found that the best way to do this is in small steps and to focus on the potential for reducing costs and improving performance.

However, it is increasingly common in the global arena that an OEM gets a brief from a potential customer which can only be met by the use of state-of-the-art technologies. The result is a radical new machine design and a step change in performance expectations.

Usually, the brief is expressed as a productivity target, for example the number of products to be made per hour or the number of hours a machine must be available for use, rather than as a requirement to use a certain technology. Mitsubishi can help OEMs identify the best technologies for each situation, so let's look at some recent examples.

End-users often want a machine that can speed up the production rate. Perhaps the most obvious solutions here are to either use multiple production cells or to speed up existing procedures. However, another solution is to redesign the production procedures so that they are fully automatic – taking human operatives out of the equation also does away with meal breaks, comfort breaks and other stoppages, allows the use of longer shifts and often improves quality and consistency.

Robots prove ideal for complex tasks, being able to maintain a high rate of production over extended periods without loss of concentration on the quality issues. They are equally at home with simple tasks and while a robot solution may seem like overkill, financial calculations will prove that the investment is paid back in improved productivity.

Robots are also useful if the tasks required vary during a production run, for example assembling a range of products that vary in size, colour or detail rather than all being identical. It is important to realise that robots are also very flexible – so easily redeployable – ensuring that they are always in use and therefore producing a return on their investment.

Another enabling technology is motion control. Its use in for example electronics, high-speed assembly, sortation, etc. is well-known. It has many other uses too: for instance one of our customers has used high-performance servo motors in a conveyor system, instead of the usual induction motors. The advantage is that this conveyor can transport non-rigid products filled to the brim with liquid, without spilling a drop. In another project, precision motion was used to accurately dispense a glutinous batter-like liquid in exact quantities and without any waste.

The UK OEM market has become much more adventurous in recent years – more willing to consider new technologies, more willing to work overseas, more willing to push boundaries. There is a new-found confidence and desire to achieve and newly discovered support and respect from the wider community. Mitsubishi is actively supporting OEMs in their ambitions, helping push the boundaries of technology, design and business.

## About Mitsubishi Electric

With over 90 years of experience in providing reliable, high-quality products to both corporate clients and general consumers all over the world, Mitsubishi Electric Corporation is a recognized world leader in the manufacture, marketing and sales of electrical and electronic equipment used in information processing and communications,



# PRESS RELEASE

27.02.2014



space development and satellite communications, consumer electronics, industrial technology, as well as in products for the energy sector, water and waste water, transportation and building equipment.

With around 121.000 employees the company recorded consolidated group sales of 29,5 billion Euro\* in the fiscal year ended March 31, 2013. Our sales offices, research & development centres and manufacturing plants are located in over 30 countries.

Mitsubishi Electric Europe, Industrial Automation – UK Branch is located in Hatfield, United Kingdom. It is a part of the European Factory Automation Business Group based in Ratingen, Germany which in turn is part of Mitsubishi Electric Europe B.V., a wholly owned subsidiary of Mitsubishi Electric Corporation, Japan.

The role of Industrial Automation – UK Branch is to manage sales, service and support across its network of local branches and distributors throughout United Kingdom.

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