

CBG SYSTEMS' MARINE INSULATION BUSINESS RIDES WAVE OF SUCCESS

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With 40 years in the marine insulation business, CBG Systems has grown from a two-person contracting team to a world leader in state-of-the-art marine insulation.

CBG Systems' passive fire protection systems are used in high-performance civilian vessels such as high-speed aluminium ferries, as well as in merchant marine and military vessels.

What began in Hobart in 1978 as a two-person concern has expanded to a global team of 60 employees, including engineers and manufacturers located in the US, Canada and Spain.

'Forty years ago the company had one product and one customer – Incat, a Tasmanian-based manufacturer of high-speed craft catamaran ferries,' explains Javier Herbon, Managing Director of CBG Systems.

'Today, Incat is still our customer and our product line has grown from one to ten fire protection systems, with more in the research and development phase.'

CBG Systems expanded internationally to follow Incat and its other long-term client, Austal, headquartered in Western Australia. By doing so, CBG Systems gained new clients such as the US Navy and Coast Guard, as well as various European navies. They were impressed by the technical advancement of CBG Systems' insulation and its lightweight, panelised construction.

Parting fire from water

CBG Systems' flagship products are the Rapid Access Composite (RAC) and Rapid Access Stainless (RAS) systems, which protect the integrity



CBG Systems' Rapid Access Composite system

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Javier Herbon, Managing Director, CBG Systems

of a ship for 60 minutes while evacuation and fire control can take place.

RAC and RAS systems comply with International Maritime Organisation certification standards and are installed on defence and merchant marine vessels in over 30 countries, including in the US, Europe and Asia.

In fact, more than 90 per cent of the world's high-speed aluminium ferries are fitted with a CBG passive fire protection system.

CBG Systems also supplies and installs specialist antenna systems and signature-management systems for land-based vehicles and structures, which are designed to save lives and assets.



Australian Government

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Continuous innovation

'We are driven by a strong focus on innovation,' says Herbon. 'The company's three constants for product innovation are that everything we create has to be lightweight, easy to install and low maintenance.'

In 2016, CBG Systems commenced a partnership with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and AusIndustry to create RAC Plus, the next generation of CBG Systems' RAC fire protection systems.

'It is very pleasing to reach the commercialisation stage of RAC Plus in December 2018, because it coincides with our celebration of the company's 40th anniversary,' explains Herbon.

What sets Australian advanced manufacturers apart, says Herbon, is their willingness to continuously innovate.

'I think the key word is "advanced" – we can't take that word lightly,' he explains. 'To be advanced means you have to be innovative. Being innovative means you have to surround yourself with a team of well-rounded people, for example, engineers with good commercial sense.'

'Innovation means bringing lots of variables together – at the right price for the market. Advanced manufacturing is the only future for manufacturing in Australia. It requires strong financial investment and focus.'

Focusing on defence contracts

In June 2018, Austrade and the Australian Defence Export Office signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance export support for Australian defence businesses.

Herbon says the MoU will enhance the defence side of his business, which already comprises 50 per cent of annual revenue. As an Australian exporter, he believes there is no better time to access defence security procurement opportunities.

For example, in 2017 CBG Systems acquired Moonraker Antenna Systems, a Tasmanian exporter that designs and manufactures complex antenna systems. CBG Systems identified an opportunity for Moonraker to tender for the Italian Naval Law Program, a multi-year procurement program to renew Italy's naval fleet.

'Securing that contract was a testament to CBG Systems' advanced manufacturing capabilities,' says Herbon. 'It also paved the way for future Australian and international naval projects.'

'It's not as hard as people think, as a manufacturer, to supply the defence industry. Once you have "geared up" for defence and done it once, you are ready to go. And once you are trained and capable, no one can take that knowledge away from you. I always encourage people to do it.'

Austrade assistance

Over the years CBG Systems has expanded into new international markets with assistance from Austrade.

'We have received a lot of assistance in the form of market intelligence around the Japanese and South Korean markets, which are very important markets for us,' says Herbon.

'We have seen a great advantage in using the expertise of Austrade to provide us with understanding and cultural intelligence; facilitating meetings and so on. We went through that experience with Austrade three years ago in Japan and South Korea.'

'Also, having Austrade's assistance in meetings, particularly in first meetings, gives us the credibility of the "badge of government" from the Commonwealth of Australia – we have definitely seen the benefit.'

'For example, we attended EURONAVAL 2018, a naval trade show in Paris in October 2018. Austrade advisers were instrumental in unlocking meetings and contacts that perhaps we wouldn't have been able to unlock on our own.'

About Austrade

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