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Glenda Roberts Q&A: Women in Fasteners feature

Credit: Interplas Insights, Grace Nolan



Q: How did your career path lead to your current role?

I was Regional Sales Manager with several American owned companies selling fast moving consumables such as food and beverage products to supermarkets and pharmacies. This was in the 1980's before computerization, when stock management and replenishment planning to ensure that the product was in the right place, in volume and on time, was a very manual process. I could see that with new technologies emerging the need for large sales forces would become a thing of the past. I interviewed with an agency and landed a role in a Fastener Distribution company and the rest is history! I just about knew the difference between a screw, nut and washer, but I had a good sales track record and fortunately a few good mentors who helped me with the product knowledge over time.

Q: Could you discuss the strategy behind TR's success in plastics as a growth area.

TR has been known for their Vendor Managed Systems within customers production facilities since the 1980's. It was quite revolutionary at the time and JIT stock became the vogue. As these systems provided real benefits for customers in terms of TCO - Total Cost of Ownership e.g. reduced stock levels and increased stock turns more product was added to the system. It was inevitable the plastic fasteners and cable management products were added. We recruited Kevin Rogers as Commodity Manager to develop the range, identify vendors, and create the sales and marketing strategy for the product range.

Kevin came with a wealth of experience from his previous

role and was recently promoted to Director of Plastics and Rubber - Sourcing and Category Management.

Initially we focused on supplying the non-automotive industry sector, but over time as we have developed the vendor base this is now a growth area for us. Having a prototyping capability, with much shorter tooling lead times for specials has been a winning combination. We focus on collaborating and giving support to customers providing the right solution for their application, whether it is a standard product or one that needs developing from scratch. Early involvement is a key factor.

Training internal and external sales personnel is vital and we have online training tools to assist, and staff in our products team who are on hand to give technical and commercial support. The TR website is a go to place for Engineers and Designers and we have added over a thousand new products to enhance the range in recent months. Full technical specifications are available supported by CAD models and an increasing number of animations to illustrate where the product can be used.

Recruiting in expertise in this Commodity has been key and Andrew Fletcher joined earlier this year as Director of Plastics and Rubber – Commercial and Technical.

Q: What are your hopes for 2021? Do you have any upcoming projects?

The pent-up demand following lockdown, and the trend for people upgrading their home, managing their health during this period has seen a significant rise in Domestic Appliance production and Health related products.



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All of these are fastener rich with a high content of plastic fasteners required.

To drive business forwards during the Covid-19 period, we have invested in new production machinery in Asia, Italy and the UK to build up our in-house capability and increase capacity on metal fasteners. The plastic fastener range is very diverse, and our focus is developing further world class vendors and adding them to our supply base. Kevin and Andrew have been frustrated at not being able to travel during this period of time and hopefully now we can see some easing of restrictions, this could become possible again. We do have SQE engineers based on each Continent and that has helped us to a degree in assessing new vendors. We are focused on adding new products to our existing extensive range and meeting the needs of the latest and exciting opportunities in Electric Vehicle (EV) and Battery Housings (BEV).

We are actively seeking acquisitions of companies with a similar culture to TR to increase our manufacturing portfolio and increase our production capacity. At this moment in time we are recruiting in a number of our Regions to further strengthen the teams, and also to bring in new skills. A good example which helped earlier this year would be where we have recruited specialists in customs processes due to Brexit which helped us through this difficult learning curve. Basically, there is never a dull moment!

Q: How important do you feel female role models are to the younger generation and did you have one?

It was a very male dominated industry many years ago

as most fastener companies then were manufacturers and not distributors. I did not have a female role model and never felt that I needed one either. I had some great people early on who recognised that if they helped and supported me that we would make a strong team with a combination of sales skills and their engineering expertise..

Young recruits today just expect to see a well-balanced and diverse workforce.

Q: Do you feel there is enough information/opportunities for the next generation to be encouraged to have a career in your line of work?

There are so many opportunities for the next generation in our industry. The world will always need fasteners, so it has longevity and our teams interact globally, so it is an exciting company to be in. I have travelled on company business to four continents and love sharing interesting experiences with my colleagues! It is a fascinating industry as our fastenings go into an amazing range of products from Medical, Domestic Appliances, Defence, 5G infrastructures to Electric Vehicles.

We are members of Women in The Fastener Industry (WIFI) who promote roles for women in the industry to open up opportunities and see the potential for a great career in fastenings, and I am living proof.

