

MANROLAND SHEETFED – A STORY OF EVOLUTION

By **Alan Hurndall**, Independent Journalist

Manroland Sheetfed is in rude health, posting consistent profits and launching a ground breaking new Press – the ROLAND 700 Evolution. When Tony Langley stepped in to save the company from the Receiver three years ago, the German print giant was on a life support machine. **Alan Hurndall** speaks to Manroland’s CEO **Rafael Penuela** about the road to recovery.



Rafael Penuela

Chief Executive Officer
Manroland Sheetfed GmbH

In 2014 it made a €15m contribution to Group profits on a revenue of €288.2m.

There’s one illuminating story that sums up the difference between Manroland past and present.

In those dark days pre 2012, as Head of Sales, Rafael Penuela would spend three-quarters of his working day in rounds of endless meetings.

He practically lived in the boardroom, briefing an army of colleagues.

The pedigree and technical expertise of a highly regarded workforce was always there. But it was an organisation stifled by formality, structure, and process. It was paralysis by analysis. And the company hit the rocks.

“At that time I was an expert of Powerpoint presentations to whole groups of people. But since the takeover I haven’t done one,” says Rafael, now the CEO for the whole Manroland operation.

“The most people I have in meetings now is four and since the takeover I’ve only been in the boardroom on a handful of occasions.”

We speak via video link to the company headquarters in Offenbach, the heartland of German precision engineering. It’s a vast village, occupying 70 acres. Half the 1,600 or so workforce are stationed there, the remainder spread across the globe in sales and marketing.

The Manroland acquisition by the Langley Group in 2012 surprised many by its audacity. The target company was bigger than the burgeoning British-based multi-disciplined

engineering group, and Manroland is now the largest of Langley’s divisions both in revenue and employee terms.

The son of a construction worker, Rafael was born in Spain but moved to Germany as a nine-year-old – the only place where his father could find work. After a transition period, Tony Langley asked Rafael, who’d been associated with Manroland one way or another since 1992, to run the new organisation. His promotion meant he’s had to learn other areas of the business to complement his sales expertise.

An early interesting tactic was to stop targeting customers who were already tied



to the machinery of competitors. Instead, the emphasis was giving all Manroland clients added value in terms of support, quality, efficiency, and operation.

The first thing the new Manroland had to do was to learn to stand on its own feet. Its masters made it clear that there would be no handouts, no loans from shareholders or banks.



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“That’s a very healthy philosophy because it means you can only spend what you earn,” says Rafael.

Market conditions didn’t help. The printed word declined against the advance of electronic media. Demand in China, which buys 30 per cent of all presses, slumped dramatically almost overnight.

The market setback was countered by efficiencies across the company, moving all the manufacturing operations onto the one site, and selling surplus buildings for redevelopment. To survive, everything had to be streamlined.

On the upside, packaging is booming across the globe and the new regime recognises that the demand isn’t necessary for faster presses but ones that are more efficient with enhancement bells and whistles.

“Whereas clients were once looking at 60, 70, 80,000 impressions per job the average run is now 10,000, so speed isn’t so vital,” says Rafael.

The emphasis is more on faster changeover and easier handling.

Rafael has another analogy.

“If you live 100 miles from the office you need a fast car. But if you move much nearer you don’t need the speed anymore. You look for reliability.”

Founded in 1871, the Manroland name has been connected with a number of industry milestones.

It built its first sheetfed offset in 1911, the single-colour Klein-Roland came a decade later, and the 4-colour sheetfed offset press The Ultra was unveiled in 1951.

Manroland has called on its expertise and rich history to produce another ground-breaking press.

In November 2014, the company launched its latest trailblazer, the Roland 700 Evolution,

setting a new standard in press technology.

The Evolution supersedes the Roland 700 HS and the Roland 700 Direct Drive on an all-new platform and is aimed at further reducing downtime.

Among the developments are a new central console with touch-screen control and a new feeder pile transport that cuts down on waste.

The Evolution’s new suction-belt sheet-handling technology ensures a more even pile contour. Other features include all-new dampening units in the press and bearings that significantly reduce vibration meaning a quieter run and reduced wear and tear.

The Evolution was conceived, developed and launched in just two years.

“Before, we would have spent two years just deciding whether or not we were going to do it,” says Rafael ruefully.

It has just won a coveted Red Dot Award for Product Design, the largest and most recognised product competition in the world. The judges included academics, designers and journalists from 25 countries who waded through nearly 5,000 entries.

Earlier this month, the first customer to purchase the new machine – Samson Druck, a prestigious print house in Austria – ordered a second.

Rafael, 55, presides over a much leaner and fitter outfit. The proof of the pudding is the first three years accounts – gradual progress despite a worldwide downturn in demand for new presses.

In 2014 it made a €15m contribution to Group profits on a revenue of €288.2m.

“This is satisfactory bearing in mind that the sector has undergone a paradigm shift, seeing demand for new presses plummet by over two-thirds from its peak in 2007,” say the Group annual accounts.

The evolution continues!