Educating the Market is what it takes

Headquartered in Boisbriand, just outside Montreal, *APG-Neuros, Inc.* is the driving force behind a new generation of high-speed turbo blowers for the wastewater treatment industry. It has taken the company three years to educate the market about this new development, but it is now beginning to harvest the fruits of its labour.

APG-Neuros is a joint venture technology development company formed between Aviation and Power Group (APG), founded by Mr. Omar Hammoud in Québec in August 2005, and the Neuros Company, originally founded in Deajeon, South Korea, in 2000. Omar Hammoud was the prime mover in instigating the venture. He recalls: *"We had a market with very strong possibilities for our technology in wastewater treatment plants."* In this marriage, Neuros was responsible for technology development, while APG looked after the rest of business. *"We actually moved the entire development team to Canada and went on to set up production facilities near New York City."*

Our interview partner for this feature, APG-Neuros President Omar Hammoud

Presently, APG-Neuros employs sixteen members of staff. In 2010, the company is looking at employing another twenty-five people. *"Industry at large is laying off while we are expanding,"* states Omar Hammoud. Since the United States is the company's core market, there are two branch offices in this country besides the aforementioned production facility. In fact, the US market is responsible for around 95% of business, without exception municipal contracts with wastewater companies.

Remarkably, APG-Neuros' installed Turbo Blower fleet has exceeded 120 units in North America and its turnover has risen from sixty thousand dollars in 2006 to ten million in 2009. The outlook for 2010 is an impressive fifteen to twenty million dollar sales revenue. When asked what has driven the rise in turnover in the past few years, Omar Hammoud replies: *"The Obama stimulus plan has obviously played a major role in this growth. However, what has really made the difference was our three-year exercise to educate the market. The technology for blowers in industry has been stagnating for a long time, as there has not been any significant technological progress since the mid 1980s. Blowers are considered inefficient and not environmentally friendly. In 2005, we took our technology to the engineering companies and end users, i.e. municipalities in the US and demonstrated its benefits and how it can improve wastewater processing. Initially, there was a lot of resistance - this was exacerbated by municipal bidding; when looking for solutions to wastewater problems or new technologies, the local governments would always take the lowest bid. In fact, this has been driving down the industry for many years. We had to literally show the government departments how this technology can help them. It has taken a long time - educating the market is a slow process, but it is worth it in the long run."*

The spacious Neuros production facility in South Korea

The state-of-the-art APG-Neuros production plant in the United States

The APG-Neuros turbo blower is a plug-and-play product that offers high efficiency in a compact size made possible by combining the latest design technologies of aeronautic compressor, bump foil air bearing and high-speed permanent magnet synchronous motors with built-in variable speed drive and programmable logic controller. The blowers are produced in Canada and the United States for the western market and Korea for the eastern market. *"Today, we have the capacity to produce three hundred and fifty units per year, although we can expand this. The Korean plant can produce another six hundred units,"* explains Omar Hammoud.

Markets of interest for APG-Neuros include the Americas, Europe, Africa and the Middle East where the company is planning on expanding its presence to these markets by opening regional operational centres in these markets, starting with launching its European headquarters in Brussels in June 2010, and will shortly announce its first installation in Europe to be in operation as well during the summer of 2010. Neuros is achieving good success in China, Japan and Korea and is eying future expansion into India and South-East Asia Says Omar Hammoud: *"The western markets are very active with the environmental regulations and spending on infra structure. The evolution of the eastern markets is happening in a similar way to those in the West, but at a slower pace. Governments recognise the fact that waste in their rivers and pollution is too high and they have to react. They pass new laws to drive the cleaning-up process, which in turn leads to the local municipalities looking for 'green' solutions. China is looking at the leading countries in the West and watching what they are doing and how they are handling this."*

APG-Neuros turbo blower at Franklin Wastewater Treatment Plant, New Hampshire, in the USA

The APG-Neuros philosophy is the answer to all those still sceptical about blower technology in wastewater treatment. Our interviewee emphasises: *"We want to contribute to creating individual high-tech products that meet the stringent regulations. We have highly efficient solutions and seek to contribute to creating a better environment, reducing pollution and educating customers."* The future of APG-Neuros will see the launch of other innovative products: The micro gas turbine, for example, is a spin-off product from the company's technology designed to burn "off gas" from wastewater plants to generate energy. *"We have three units being field tested at the moment in Korea,"* closes Omar Hammoud.

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