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FASCINATING FASTENERS

Acument Global Technologies*
make the nuts, screws, and bolts
that hold industry together.

The language of makers threads through our business vocabulary. We build organizations, carve out niches, nail down strategies, drill down into the details, and spend lots of time explaining the nuts and bolts of what we do.

When it comes to the business of making actual nuts, bolts, and screws, shorthand won't cover it. The technology and innovation underpinning the fastener industry is highly complex, compelling, and critically important to virtually every industry.

“The reality is that when you get to the science of components, whether it's fasteners or bearings or otherwise, there are textbooks full of technical information covering the deep and complex know-how,” noted Michael Claassen, VP of North American Engineering and of Global IP Licensing for multinational fastening leader Acument Global Technologies.

A particularly serious challenge is the sheer volume of fasteners in existence and the exhaustive variety of applications they must correctly match. In fact, no single manufacturer can come close to making the entire global catalog of fasteners.

“A screw looks simple. You might look at it and think there’s nothing to it, but it’s actually comprised of an extremely wide range of design features and alternatives,” he stressed.

For nearly 80 years, Acument has been an industry innovator known for its value-added screws, bolts, nuts, and cold formed components. With domestic headquarters in Sterling Heights, Mich., and a domestic workforce in excess of 1,700, the firm manufactures a variety of trusted brand names in the fastener industry, including the aforementioned TORX® Drive, TORX PLUS® Drive, TORX Paralobe™ Drive, STRUX® Fasteners, LE USA®, Mag-Form® Fasteners, Z-Form®, EVO PT®, and Taptite® Fasteners.

Acument’s fit-for-purpose solutions are used in the industrial, aerospace, transportation, and building and construction markets, and the company operates in eight countries on four continents. Their parent, Italian fastener giant Fontana Gruppo, has a 67-year history of creating fastening products across a range of sectors including

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DAN DI SEBASTIAN, CEO

automotive, earthmoving, agriculture, and building and construction.

“Our products have grown with our customers,” revealed company CEO Dan Di Sebastian. “Over many years of supporting large mining companies, as well as manufacturing equipment companies like Caterpillar, John Deere, and Cummings, as they have grown we have grown with them. We’ve been a system supplier for about 70 years. Part of that is a joint partnership; developing products with and for our customers to provide the fastening solutions they need.”

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Curtis' plants in both the Sterling Heights, Michigan and Machesney Park, Illinois area utilize world-class processing to provide metal finishing, heat treating, and product development services capabilities that are unmatched by its competitors.



“ON A DAILY BASIS, OUR APPLICATIONS ENGINEERS WORK WITH OUR CUSTOMERS TO DRILL DOWN INTO THE APPLICATION NEEDS TO PRECISELY ASSESS FUNCTION, MATERIALS, AND ASSEMBLY EFFICIENCY FOR THEIR APPLICATION.”

building lighter vehicles calls for new approaches in fastening technology. “They’re constantly looking for lighter weight fasteners that are strong enough for their purpose,” Di Sebastian said. “There’s a lot of science behind strength of materials, engines, transmissions, and high tolerance machinery. When you’re building bridges those bolts have to last a long time. And in the aerospace sector there are really high tolerances and quality and safety guidelines to be met, so the product has to be perfect.”

THERE’S MORE THAN YOU THINK TO THE AVERAGE SCREW

To illustrate the complexity hidden in a piece of everyday hardware that most of us take for granted, Claassen explained the basic anatomy of a screw: “It starts with material and heat treat selection. Next, there’s the drive system on top where we prefer TORX® of course because we invented that technology. There’s the bearing surface, which can have different configurations; the shank of the screw, the thread system with all different kinds

of geometries available depending on what you’re trying to accomplish, a point at the end of the screw, and different finishes and patches. All of these different elements and the myriad choices add up to the final product, and each has to be tailored for specific customer needs for the both the function they’re trying to achieve and assembly efficiency.

“On a daily basis, our applications engineers work with our customers to drill down into the application needs to

OUR CUSTOMERS TO DRILL ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS CUSTOMER THE BEST VALUE, DAN DI SEBASTIAN

precisely assess functional requirements in order to specify the correct fastener that gives a customer the best value, function, and assembly efficiency for their application.”

Acument’s cutting-edge fastener testing and metallurgical laboratories provide their customers with failure analysis, and feature a scanning electron microscope among a wide ranges of equipment that allows us to perform metallurgical, quality, function specific, R&D, and customer drive strategy

assessments. Application engineering services include design and application assistance, application issue resolution, value analysis and engineering, onsite applications engineers, technical education, product samples, and prototypes. CAD services include 2D part drawings, 3D modeling, translations, and FEA simulation.

With the largest intellectual property licensing program in the industry, Acument enables competitors around the world to use their expertise and

technology. And, in a stark departure from other manufacturing industries, they will occasionally partner with licensed competitors to develop new products.

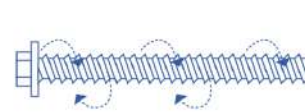
Several factors ground that strategy; despite some consolidation, the fastener market is fragmented and no one manufacturer can make all of the fastener types on the market. There are tight margins to consider, and the industry is notoriously capital intensive, so issues of scalability abound.

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PROTECT OURSELVES FROM FLUCTUAT
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“There’s no one company that has the resources to develop every fastening technology,” Claassen stressed. “To really get scale on any given product, you have to license the technology to other fastener makers so it can become a global standard that end users all around the world can source and use from a reliable global network with consistent quality. That’s what drives us to partner with competitors at times.”

Acument’s presence in Mexico as one of the only fastener manufacturer in the country has expanded to meet the demands of an influx of Detroit-based and international car companies such as Volkswagen, as well as the needs of other industrial and building and construction interests. “It made sense for us to expand our footprint,” Di Sebastian said. “We built a facility four times the size of what we had and have given

ourselves lots of expansion capability so we can grow with our customers.”

The goal, Di Sebastian noted, is to become the No. 1 fastener manufacturer in Mexico. “We have given ourselves the ability to vertically integrate a number of our processes, and have consolidated a couple of our warehouses to be more efficient. As the OEMs in Mexico grow we are ready to support them by providing logistical savings, reduced lead times on delivery, and quicker turnaround when developing new products.

“We see a lot of opportunity to grow going forward and we’ve positioned ourselves so we have the space and the technology available.”

Product diversification is another initiative recently undertaken by the firm. Said Di Sebastian, “We see that our technology is applicable in all of the sectors we

serve, and we try to protect ourselves from fluctuations in the market. When there is a downturn in the automotive sector, we can be flexible and provide more product to another sector that might be growing, like aerospace or building and construction.

“When Congress passes a highway infrastructure bill that’s a big deal for us, and we want to be positioned in that market to provide those products as quickly as possible. We built our engineering and manufacturing capabilities in such a way that it’s flexible enough to react to swings in the market. We also understand the technology so that as people are investing in, for example, battery powered electric vehicles, we want to create fastening solutions for them. We are constantly looking at where the market trends are, and we try to stay in those markets.” ■

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