

Metalplast Srl, Italy, leads the market by providing high-quality and flexible stainless steel tubing fabricating services

Small-batch production but with high levels of **complexity** and **quality**



Metalplast started in 1987 as a small family-run job shop specialising in metal tube processing. From its small beginnings, with only three people, the company has grown and evolved to become a successful business driven by technology and innovation. Mr. Gava, together with his wife Anna Casagrande, and his son Stefano, manages a twenty-employee organization that leads the market in terms of flexibility and production quality. "Entering into the catering equipment market turned out to be a very rewarding decision" says Mrs. Casagrande. "It enabled us to increasingly gain valuable experience and knowledge in how to process exotic metal like stainless steel. Today, we are very pleased to be the main supplier of important companies in this market, like Electrolux. The ability to meet the high-quality standards imposed by the catering equipment industry, together with the know-how accumulated over the years in the stainless steel fabrication process, have significantly helped us to enter other rele-

vant markets, such as the furniture industry, with innovative design solutions, lighting, hospital, and the heating-refrigeration markets. Even if we mainly deal with stainless steel, we can also work, as every good "job shop" does, with other materials like mild steel and aluminum.

From quality semi-finished products to finished products

In these difficult times of economic downturn and market volatility, the only way for a "job shop" to survive and thrive is by increasing, as much as possible, the number of end-user markets served to compensate for potential losses in one or more of them. Accordingly, Metalplast is pursuing a diversification strategy, however, this strategy is quite atypical for a pure "job shop". In fact, by taking advantage of its core competencies, the company has recently started a new production line for the catering industry, under its own brand name.



A long list of machines

Constantly updating the technology of its machines is not only one of Metalplast's priorities, but also the direct consequence of Mr. Gava's business vision. The entrepreneur, indeed, strongly believes in the importance of being always ready to rapidly and effectively respond to the changing market expectations in terms of both production capacity and quality of the semi-finished products.

"The BLM Group has always been, in these past years, our technological partner. We are very satisfied with the technological level of its machinery and with the company's ability to understand our production needs and translate them into concrete and efficient solutions" explains Mr. Gava. "The number of BLM machines installed in our workshop clearly demonstrates the long-term relationship with the Group of Cantù. In particular, we have the following machines available: six BLM tube bending machines, from the conventional Dynam0 to the innovative E-TURN all electric bending machine, two AST end-forming machines, one ST660 deburring machine, two ADIGE LT712 and LT652 laser tube cutting machines, and two ADIGE sawing machines.

In addition to this equipment, we have just installed a multi-head bender for wire, a machine that only recently, as a result of the takeover of Montorfano, has become part of the BLM Group's family of products. Thanks to this recent investment, we

can add wire processing to our range of production services thus becoming more competitive in our market sector.

Experience, reliability, design skills, and know-how, are all important characteristics for companies like ours. Nevertheless, without the proper machinery and technology to turn ideas into successful products, it is hard to survive today's market" adds Mrs. Casagrande. "Therefore, in order to make the right investments decisions, it is necessary to anticipate the future technology needs, and, accordingly, plan the company's technological growth path".

INSPIRED FOR TUBE

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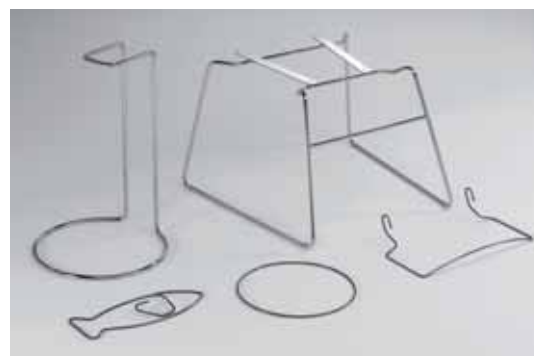
Laser and variable radius both deliberate decisions

Yes! It is because of its carefully planned investment approach that Metalplast, since 2000/2001, is experiencing a remarkable and steady growth trend. Two investment decisions, in particular, have been decisive for the company's development: the acquisition of modern tube bending machines with variable radius and the introduction of laser tube processing technology.

With regard to the first decision, by using modern bending machines with variable radius, Metalplast has extended the scope of services offered, thus widening the distinction "gap" with its direct com-

petitors. "It was really a worthwhile decision – says satisfied Mrs. Casagrande – because it enabled us to further develop our manufacturing competencies. We were finally able to perform fabrication processes that before this investment were quite impracticable. As soon as we employed the new bending technology, we were capable of satisfying all the requirements of the existing and new customers, even the more particular and challenging ones".

Also the second investment decision, that is, the acquisition of the two ADIGE laser tube cutting systems, was well thought-out and deliberate. "The Laser technology was adopted to satisfy our internal production needs" explains Mr. Gava. "We were mainly working products with high aesthetic value, thus requiring precision, quality and short execution time. The introduction of laser technology significantly contributed to our ability to fulfill these requirements and to overcome the limitations of the traditional operations, which we considered to be the "weakest link" in our production chain. We wanted to ensure our customers' satisfaction, so we focused on improving our products and our cutting process". "The laser also helped us to think differently – adds Mrs.



Casagrande – giving the ability to create tube joints, unthinkable before, and the intrinsic potential of modern Lasertube machines, we had to reconsider entirely our products, in fact, we extended their functionality and increased their robustness. In addition, the production cycle was very much improved, with considerable benefits in terms of time and productivity. We frequently have to deal with challenging and

innovative ideas, drawings, and design proposals, which, unfortunately, do not take into account implementation constraints. Because of their inadequate knowledge of these specific technologies, sometimes designers wrongly assume that, everything is possible, and that tubes can be bended in any shape; they do not take into consideration the material and tools restrictions. This explains why we have to be very polite and persuasive in recommending the design adjustments necessary to optimize the final product. However, the most difficult part is to make the designers understand the reasons behind these modifications without hurting their feelings”.

Metalplast processes tubes with diameters ranging from 12 to 60 mm with its bending machines and to 120 mm with its laser machines. As far as the batch-size is concerned, the company works complex parts but in small batches, ranging from 20 to 100 pieces. Giving that these parts are frequently requested, the company maintains some minimum level of inventory, and therefore, is able to rapidly respond to even the most urgent of requests. This need for rapid response time also explains why Metalplast has invested in two laser tube cutting systems.