View From the Top

It’s been six months since Owen Knight joined Hydraulink as CEO. Link caught up with him recently for an update on what lies ahead for Hydraulink.

Tell us about your journey so far.

I have spent much of my time coming to understand the business and marketplace, and also meeting distributors and customers so that I can understand their wants and needs. The acquisition of the Queensland business in October and the gradual integration process that followed made the past few months more interesting.

Were there aspects of the business that drew your focus?

After reflecting on how well aligned the business is to meet our customers’ needs, both in culture and structure, I found areas for improvement.

Our structure and how it functioned needed a change. Putting a national focus for all of our sales activities through one person limited how well we serviced our distributors, and it was not the best use of Michael Popovic’s experience. I have reorganised the reporting channels into new State Management functions so that we can be more reactive at a local level, and the State Managers can truly own the performance of their territory.

Michael Popovic now assumes a new Business Development role with a clear focus on specific opportunities in either product or market development. Michael’s vast experience will deliver long-term benefit to all of our customers.

There’s a lot of growth happening around the network. Hydraulink’s Queensland coverage, to take one example, will expand as Hydraulink Australia makes a strategic move to acquire a business that will stimulate market share gains in that state.

We understand customer service is also one of your top priorities?

We should never forget that our ability to serve the customer is what keeps us successful.

I believe that our level of customer service is not where it needs to be. While all of our team have a strong customer focus, it can sometimes come across that we lack a “can do” attitude. This is certainly not the case.

We will recruit new staff to improve our levels of technical ability, and to make that available to customers via the customer service team. Our capability will grow progressively and we will be monitoring our customer feedback closely.

We will also invest in a new business Intelligence software package so that we can more effectively monitor our key indicators like on-time delivery performance, backorder status and warranties.

We will be implementing an ISO9001 accreditation program. I don’t believe in complex procedures that are difficult to follow, but I do believe in having a base level of internal systems that we can follow and continuously improve upon.

To lead this change in customer service, we have recruited a new Operations Manager responsible for all product and customer service functions.

Heard you’re on the move?

We have begun the process to find a new head office. Our facility in Wetherill Park limits our ability to service the customer as it is too small, it lacks basic amenities and being housed across two buildings limits our internal functionality and relationships.

It looks like a major transformation is afoot?

While all of this may seem like a significant change, it is really only reflective of the business growth that Hydraulink and our broad network has enjoyed. All companies must evolve to remain relevant and these changes, combined with the strength of our great distribution network, will ensure continued success for us all.
Meet Steve Bryant

Steve, the new Financial Controller, comes to Hydraulink from MCGAine Brennan and is a long-time colleague and friend of NSW State Manager Luke Schweizer. Steve’s role is to manage the financial reporting and fiscal responsibilities of the business.

LINK asked Steve about his plans for the year ahead.

What were your initial challenges?

The first thing is to get to know this particular business. There are a lot of challenges on the ball such as integrating the Queensland business and fine-tuning some of the accounting processes. Owen Knight brings some fresh ideas and initiatives to the business, and I clearly need to work closely with him to bring those to fruition.

How has your friendship and professional relationship with Luke affected your new role?

It’s been great – a seamless hand-over. Luke knows my strengths, and I know his strengths so we both feel very comfortable about the handover. We’ve known quantities to each other.

Still, this is a very challenging time of year. I’ve stepped into the financial year end and budget wrap-up and the integration of Queensland into the Pronto database ALL on the radar. These are positive challenges though.

What do you want to get your teeth into?

I’d like to see the budget nailed and the new branch come on board into Pronto seamlessly. It’s also good to get into your own rhythm and understand the rhythm of the business in terms of board reporting and providing management information as required. We all bring different skill sets. I am very confident that Luke has done a good job here, but I’m hoping there is something I can bring to the table to make a difference. I look forward to being part of the growth and development of the company.

Welcome Tony Cichetti

Anthony (Tony) Cichetti is the new Operations Manager for Hydraulink Australia.

Tony’s previous position was with Talora. He has an extensive background in operations management, supply chain logistics and reverse logistics, inventory management and customer service. Tony also has experience in systems re-engineering using Six Sigma principles. He is a trained B2C001 auditor, a skill that will prove invaluable, as he will be driving Hydraulink’s own ISO implementation project.

Tony has qualifications in Operations Management, Project Management and a Bachelor of Economics from Sydney University.

New NSW State Manager

LINK caught up with Luke Schweizer in his new role as State Manager NSW.

How do you feel about moving on from your job as Commercial Manager?

It’s the next step in my career. I have worked in several industries and operational areas, but to achieve my career goal of becoming a General Manager, I need to focus more on customer relations and people management. This role should complete the experience I need along with my formal qualifications.

Your greatest achievement in that role?

Continuous improvement – I don’t see any one objective as a great achievement, I view the overall improvement of processes as an achievement.

What do you perceive to be the biggest challenges of your new job?

Time will be the biggest challenge, so planning will be critical to meet customer expectations and support both the internal and external sales and service offering.

High Performance at America’s Cup

Since 1995, Hydraulink New Zealand has been involved in the Emirates Team NZ challenges of the America’s Cup, including the successful defence of the Cup in Auckland in 2000. The team relies on Hydraulink’s high performance hydraulic products, systems and expertise.

A new class of boat was announced for the 2013 America’s Cup to be held in San Francisco – the AC72 wing-sail catamaran. The AC72 Class has strict parameters and demands great skill from the helmsman, crew and support team.

The introduction of “winged cats” poses a challenge for the function and layout of the hydraulic system. The compact nature of the components and the expected loads meant the hose types employed had to be capable of elevated pressures, flexible to allow routing in confined spaces, capable of matching the precision delivered by the control valves and able to provide reduced pressure drops.

To meet the hydraulics design brief, a new generation of thermoplastic hose types has been used. High tech construction features of the hose, including PA6 or polyethylene tubings, aramid reinforcing, polyurethane covers and a reduced break down in hose properties resulted in enhanced performance capabilities such as high pressure up to 700 bar plus, ultra flexibility, low volumetric expansion for fast response and precision, and low friction lines for reduced pressure loss and fast response time.

“The AC72 is a remarkably ‘technical’ boat, the hydraulic control systems for the wing sail are complex in the extreme. If it has the potential to reach speeds of more than 40 knots (75 km/ ph) so a control failure does not bear thinking about,” says Grant Dalton, Team Head, Emirates Team NZ, adding that Hydraulink’s involvement minimises that risk.

Meeting the extremes

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Hydraulink Brisbane South has been working on some big challenges lately – and they don’t come much bigger than Kador Engineering’s truck-mounted tanks.

Kador builds heavy-duty service vehicles for the resource and energy industry, from models for heavy-duty on-road trucks, to those for large mine trucks, all utilising the latest technology.

Hydraulink’s Stephen Spinks says Kador’s truck-mounted tanks hold 75,000 litres of water each and are used for dust suppression on haul roads, and can also be used as fire-fighting vehicles. The Haulmax has a fire hose on the side of the truck and a remote-controlled foam cannon fitted to the front of the tank on the top. The tipping circuit has been utilised to drive a hydraulic motor that is attached to a centrifugal water pump. The water spraying system is determined by the speed of the truck, so when the truck slows, the water automatically slows as well. This minimises pools of water on the road and gives a more even water distribution.

State Manager Neil Balsom’s decision to sponsor Buckley Ridges Cricket Club certainly paid off when the club took its second premiership in four seasons after defeating Mordialloc.

The club made history in the DDCA Turf 1 Grand Final, as Daniel Watson’s spectacular innings of 188 not out was the highest score made in a DDCA decider. The winning margin of 235 runs was also a record. Turf 3 also won their finals – and, as can be seen in the pictures, Hydraulink was there to join the celebrations.

Hydraulink Distributor Keypower Systems in Townsville looks after the hydraulics, hose and fitting needs of Pacific Marine, one of Australia’s largest boat and marine dealers. In the photo (L-R) are: Ian Wright – Maintenance Leading Hand, Pacific Marine; Deon Fields – HSST; Russell Watts, Maintenance Supervisor – Pacific Marine.