

MSA: meet the people who make your valves



Producing quality valves that consistently meet all customer needs requires input from many different disciplines. At MSA, staff work seamlessly amongst all departments, using their combined knowledge and experience to make valves that are designed to last. Invited to visit MSA's headquarters in the Czech Republic, Valve World took the opportunity to speak to various employees and was struck by their clear motivation and ambition.

By David Sear

Start talking to almost anyone inside MSA's headquarters and you'll find yourself speaking to an individual who has acquired a vast knowledge about not only his or her professional field, but about the company as a whole and especially the needs of the customers.

Take for example Miroslav Radosovsky, a young design engineer working in the development department. His job, he proudly says, is to translate each customer's unique requirements into a valve design that will stand the test of time. "In this industry customers want valves

that are perfectly geared to the specific requirements of individual applications. So for example take a recent request for a metal-to-metal seated ball valve for use at cryogenic temperatures. Such valves are commonplace, but what makes this one special is that the customer wants the valve

to meet very strict leakage rates. So my job is to select appropriate materials and design components to create the very valve he needs."

During this phase Mr. Radosovsky always bears in mind the possible consequences of his design for colleagues elsewhere. "Engineering a valve behind a PC screen is relatively easy, but I need to ensure my blueprints are practical to manufacture for my colleagues in the assembly halls," he states. Many of these colleagues are indeed good friends, as upon joining MSA Mr. Radosovsky spent his first six months in the production halls, helping to assemble valves. "This was a superb introduction to this industry and I would recommend it



Ball valves in production.

to anyone. You get to learn about valves, their components and how they work. The hands-on experiences I gained in assembly are very helpful when it comes to my current work in valve design." As well as ball valves, Mr. Radosovsky has also acquired considerable experience with gate and check valves. But whatever the valve he is working on, he says it is the interaction with external companies that is so rewarding. "I have established quite a network of contacts with suppliers which helps tremendously to keep on top of new developments about gaskets, seals, materials, etc. Talking to customers is also very enjoyable, as every client is unique and every order brings new challenges. In this job, there is always something to learn!"

Critical components

Once the valve has been designed the next step is of course to make sure all the parts required for construction are available in good time. Non-critical standard items needed on a continual basis such as nuts and bolts are readily available from multiple suppliers and for these MSA has set up a stock inventory. However, non-standard items can prove a far more difficult challenge to obtain and hence receive diligent attention from staff in the purchasing department, explains Purchasing Director Radovan Vlč. "Purchasing sounds simple, doesn't it? Just pick up a phone, place an order and hey presto, the parts are delivered. But in reality procurement is much more complex," states Mr. Vlč. "This is why staff who work in my department need a wide skill-set,

including technical insights, language abilities and of course negotiation skills." The fact that MSA makes such a wide variety of valves means that its requirements for raw and semi-finished components changes from day to day. Mr. Vlč: "items are certainly not available off the shelf and nor do they lend themselves for advance orders in bulk. An additional complexity is that the supply market can also change quickly, if for example foundry capacity is filled up by orders from say pump manufacturers. This is why our department is in constant touch with other departments within MSA, such as sales and marketing,



Expedition of ball valve.

as well as our external partners and sub-suppliers, in order to keep on top of the situation and make sure that we receive the parts we need when we need them. In many ways the purchasing department functions as a key interface within MSA as we all pull together to find real and lasting solutions for our customers.”

Having cut his teeth in many high-risk environments Mr. Vlk is well positioned to balance supplier risk and profit impact. “The simple solution could be to simply buy all the parts we might possibly need months in advance. But the cost for MSA and ultimately for our customers would be simply unsustainable. To properly budget all expenditure we are therefore in constant discussions with other departments, such as project management, sales, marketing, production, etc, so that we can take timely action based on upcoming customer needs. And whilst no-one is perfect all the time, I am delighted with the professional way my team pulls together to ensure all internal and external clients are fully satisfied.”

Flexibility

As Mr. Vlk makes abundantly clear the various departments at MSA work in close harmony to ensure the whole company functions smoothly and efficiently. This description certainly applies to the planning department where a team of three specialists are constantly refining and updating the production plan to make optimum use of all MSAs many manufacturing resources. Kamil Zurek is one of the planners. “Our job starts from the very moment an order is confirmed



A gate valve in production.



New production hall.

and entered into the system. We have to take into account the required delivery date, the numbers and types of valves that have been ordered and of course the expected delivery times of all the necessary materials and component parts to ensure the timely availability of all valves that the customer has ordered.”

Drawing up a planning schedule requires constant alertness, notes Mr. Zurek. “We may have to quickly and accurately change the plans in response to changing circumstances – for example, suppose there is a delay in the receipt of materials, or we need to repair a machine. Deviations such as these can have a major impact in the manufacturing department and it is our job to keep staff there working as efficiently as possible. So flexibility is definitely the name of the game”

Mr. Zurek, who built up extensive experience in various disciplines in the financial department before transferring to planning in 2014, says that he and his colleagues cooperate very closely with members of the procurement department and the sales department to ensure all issues are resolved in a timely and cost-effective manner. “The job might seem stressful but I find it very enjoyable. It is never a routine; there are always new challenges and something to learn. And whilst I rarely need to speak directly to clients they are always at the top of my mind. My colleagues and I do our utmost to make sure their valves are delivered on time.”

On-going communication

An employee whose position involves considerable client contact is Zdenek Herudek. He explains: “as an experienced sales engineer my specific role is to provide technical support to my sales colleagues when they are responding to enquiries or purchases orders. Together we ensure that the valve the customer receives is exactly what he needs. Understanding the customer requirements at an early stage lays the foundation for success.”

Having spent twenty-six years with MSA and visited customers far and wide Mr. Herudek is a mine of information about valve applications in various sectors. He therefore has the ideal background when it comes to determining which specific features a valve needs. “Basically I am helping our sales staff by teaching them which questions to put to their clients. Posing questions in advance about the function the valve is expected to perform, the service, the type of medium, etc, is the best way to get the job done right first time.”

Properly interpreting the customer’s needs isn’t just a matter of technology, continues Mr. Herudek. “Obviously there are some key differences between various codes which we need to be aware of. In addition, many customers have quite different interpretations of specific technical features. This is why it can be so important to keep asking questions to ensure we fully understand what each customer is asking for.”



Swing check valves being coated.

Another issue which Mr. Herudek constantly impresses on new members of the sales team is to keep checking back with the customer to see if any points may have been changed. “It is quite normal for technical details to be amended during the course of the project and even after the order for valves has been placed. This can require modifications to the valve and the quotation. Additional points can also arise during detailed engineering which we need to know about, such as the actuator orientation, coating requirements, requests for special packaging, etc. Again, that’s why we put so much emphasis on on-going client communication.”

Read the manual

The final person that Valve World had the pleasure of meeting was Martin Hanske, the Head of the Service Department. In fact, Mr. Hanske could rightly be called its



Valves for nuclear power plants.

founder, for he was asked to set up this department some ten years ago. “Basically we provide two types of service,” he explains. “By this I mean service to valves that are still within the guarantee period, and also service to products which are no longer covered by our guarantee. The message to customers is this: we take all your valve problems seriously, no matter how old your valve, and indeed no matter whether the valve is an MSA product or was made by a third party. If you need assistance, we are here to help you!”

Surprisingly, many of the problems that Mr. Hanske’s team are called upon to resolve actually involve quite basic problems. “For example, the valve may have been incorrectly handled during installation, or the media running through the valve may have changed or there might be debris in the pipeline. Such issues can cause major valve problems.”

His advice for customers who wish to prevent such valve damage is simple. “Each valve that MSA ships to clients is accompanied by a full set of instructions



Power plant installation in Kaliningrad.

for installation and use –please read this manual! We’ve seen instances where material used to package the valve during transport has not been fully removed, or an actuator has been incorrectly fitted. These problems could easily have been avoided if the instructions had been followed. Of course we can resolve client issues, and for some local customers we have a twenty-four hour response contract, but valves installed in remote locations on the other side of the globe will obviously take longer to reach and repair.”

End users are normally very pleased to see trained MSA repair crews arrive on site, says Mr. Hanske. “Customers are always satisfied to see a repair job done professionally and quickly, so service provides us with a positive good reference for future business. I believe that customers do appreciate just how pro-active we all are: if you need a quotation, if you need technical input, if you need commodity valves or specials, if you need after-sales service in any part of the world, at MSA we will all work together to serve you.”

About MSA

Full name:	MSA, a.s.
Headquarters:	Dolni Benesov, Czech Republic
Staff:	around 500 employees
Key manufactured products:	ball, gate, globe and check valves
Primary focus:	engineered products
Additional (sourced) products:	actuators plus complementary valves
Key markets:	oil and gas, petrochemicals, LNG, nuclear power, conventional power, etc.
History:	MSA can trace its roots back to 1890
Ownership:	MSA is part of the Russian Chelpepe Group, which employs over 25,000 people and has a turnover of some USD 2 billion.