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## SALMEC – back to my roots



Jose M Gerbolés, Director General, SALMEC s.a.

When, back in 1989, I completed my mechanical engineering studies in Madrid, I little thought that a metal as little known to me at the time as aluminium would bring me so much satisfaction in the years to come. Soon afterwards, following a short period of mandatory military service, I joined my family company as a trainee. This organisation had been very successful, since the early 70's, in the field of slitting; tension levelling; cut-to-length procedures, and in all types of strip finishing for the aluminium sector. The family-owned business came to an end in 2000,

when its owners decided to sell the organisation to a large multi-national plant building group.

At the time, a number of advantages of belonging to a very big multi-product group of engineering companies became evident, with strengths such as a worldwide marketing structure, strong financial support, technical excellence, an enviable reputation, etc. Our contribution to this large group was to complete the product chain, enabling the organisation to offer its customers a complete portfolio in the rolling and processing of aluminium from a single source.

The key for the successful integration of a profitable small company into a very large multi-product organisation was believed, at the time, to be the ability to maintain as much as possible of the old structure and mentality of a family-owned firm. This included a flat internal organisation, which provided for fast decision-making; a very high degree of flexibility in response to the needs of the customer and a high level of competitiveness. This target was achieved in time with very promising results.

After the year-long due diligence process was completed, the merger took place. Thereafter, the writer worked for the company over the next seven years. The first five of these were extremely successful, a period in which we were able to greatly enlarge our customer base and expand the number of countries in which we were active. As a result, we achieved a substantial increase in orders and were reasonably profitable. Moreover, we gained experience in new and advanced management procedures, administration, project control, strategy, marketing, etc.

After the fifth year, changes in the overall global organisation of the company occurred which brought new philosophies to bear. The new strategies led to more complicated internal procedures and a much higher degree of control. This moved our small business division into an operating position far removed from our targeted key to success.

Frustrated with the new business model, after long consideration, I and others, who included all the key personnel from my family's previous company, left the organisation. We subsequently set up SALMEC in Madrid, Spain, in partnership with our Italian colleagues from SALICO. The latter was another family-owned company with an outstanding level of technology in the same field as our own and active since 1978. After two years of operation, our order book continues to grow, despite the difficult economic climate.

Which business model best suits our range of products? There may be different opinions on the subject, but it is clear to the writer, after experience gained in recent years, that different strategies should not be mixed together.