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BIG INTERVIEW

Jürgen Vent
Consumer Business Group, 3M

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Bi-silque

HELPING PEOPLE TO COMMUNICATE

DELIVERING CATEGORY GROWTH

MasterVision®

Bi-OFFICEHOME AND
PERSONALBEYOND
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FOCUS

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Special Issue
**VENDOR
SPECIAL**



INSPIRING communication

Visual communications category leader Bi-silque is celebrating yet another year of impressive growth as it continues to embrace and stay ahead of an ever-changing OP environment

Visual communications (viscom) leader Bi-silque is busy securing its future for both the company and its resellers through a strategy of product innovation, category and customer expansion, and digital transformation.

Its laser-like focus is now paying huge dividends, but the manufacturer is certainly not resting on its laurels as **OPI** finds out from Bi-silque Chief Commercial Officer Beth Wright.

OPI: The past year has been incredibly successful for Bi-silque in terms of growth – what have been some of the highlights?

Beth Wright: 2016 was another double-digit growth year for the company. This past year was also another year of physical expansion as we opened two additional factories in Portugal to accommodate the growth in new product production and expansion of current business.

Our export volumes are higher than ever with our US business growing 48% domestically last year and therefore the need to expand our logistics capabilities was critical. In 2017, we will build a state-of-the-art logistics facility of over 300,000 sq ft (30,000 sq m) as well as expand our factory again with over 100,000 sq ft of new space.

OPI: What are the current trends in viscom?

BW: The major themes relate to open office space and the movement towards improved employee collaboration. Products that are focused on mobility

are growing significantly, as well as those that feature noise-cancelling properties. Glass surfaces are also increasing in popularity as it gives a 'best-in-class' writing experience with a sleek, modern aesthetic.

How does Bi-silque stay ahead of the curve?

BW: Our focus is on providing solutions for the challenges end users face in their workplaces, facilities, schools and homes. We continue to invest in consumer research in key vertical markets to design and manufacture the most relevant product to suit a particular consumer need.

The Back2Chalk collection is perfect for hospitality environments



A good illustration of this can be found within our newly launched Chalk collection which features a rustic, wide-planked, wood framed chalkboard. We interviewed a bar owner who recently opened a hipster bar in an upscale area of New York in the US. His interior designer used mix materials of dark woods and metals to create an industrial NYC loft look. Understanding the needs of that bar owner who not only needed to easily change his daily specials, but also needed signage that fit the decor of his bar, is critical.

OPI: At Paperworld, you had a large selection of boards that looked more consumer oriented, can you tell us about that.

BW: With more than half of small businesses in the US being home-based, we see this as vital for focused product development.

We have recently launched a refreshed personal board collection that has a blend of function and style focused on the home office consumer. Meg – our target persona for this collection – is a busy, work-from-home mom who balances her daily activities with her family's busy schedules. The centre of her home is her kitchen area where an alcove serves as her personal office. Our Simplicity collection is the perfect solution for her walls to have all she needs to post important messages, display pictures and schedules as well as her plan for this coming week.

OPI: The industry is moving away from traditional OP into 'beyond office supplies' – how are you supporting your resellers in this?

BW: We know our reseller partners are experiencing growth and margin pressure across their business, therefore we closely monitor and follow the current selling trends that our customers are focusing on.

Increased end user segmentation is one way we are further developing our marketing material. In addition, we've found that the targeted product development is helping to grow our resellers business, and it also provides a healthy margin for them.

Our new industrial range of products tackle everything from production planning through custom boards used by consultants implementing projects in Lean manufacturing plants. Since we make our products in-house, we possess the ability to react



swiftly to market trends and provide our customers more products to sell in this and other segments.

With the newly changed administration, we believe the corporate sector in the coming years will be a growth area due to policies related to infrastructure in the US market. We stock a full solution in this space that will help project-based resellers take advantage of this predicted upswing. We also believe our TAA compliance is more of an advantage than ever in this business climate.

Other segmentation includes the healthcare space with custom boards and an antimicrobial assortment – great for hospitals, laboratories and foodservice.

Displaying metrics and KPIs are critical in any industrial environment

“Increased end user segmentation is one way we are further developing our marketing material”

The education market also is a strong area of growth for Bi-silque and our customers. The recent hiring of education specialist salesforces by many of our reseller partners enables us to bring to market our products in a more focused effort. We produce joint collateral for many of our partners in this space including a co-branded, full-line education primary years catalogue.

Creation Station: the best in mobility with adjustable height for the primary years

OPI: You mention customer segmentation, is this helping Bi-silque to expand its customer base?

BW: Expansion and differentiating our customer base is certainly a key part of our strategy. We have made heavy investments in new products as previously discussed to broaden our range targeted to pure-play customers such as Grainger/Cromwell, Manutan, B2B Partner and other industrial accounts in our global customer base.

For 2017 and beyond, we are once again innovating by developing our high-end range and branching out into products that satisfy the architectural and



STILL SEEING GREEN

Resellers that are looking for solutions to answer environmental concerns in the market, especially as the millennial workforce continues to grow, need companies that have sustainability as a core value. Bi-silque's Earth range was the first to market in the visual communication category. As one of the top-selling global ranges for the company, Bi-office/MasterVision Earth products are being sold in the public sector, education and corporate environments where sustainability is a must. The range has expanded over the past years and many items contain the Cradle to Cradle certification. Whether it's the high post-consumer content of the Earth range, recycled wood process, or factory solar energy consumption, Bi-silque places great value on the future of the planet.

Cofinanciado por:



interior design industries. Our new Archyi brand is centred on satisfying the need for high quality and designed pieces. Some of the innovations specifically created for this range include a moulded noise reduction selection, easels made of noble materials and glass/wood LCD cabinets.

OPI: What's your biggest strength in terms of supporting your resellers?

BW: We offer the widest assortment of viscom products in the world. With Bi-silque, they can purchase a commodity product, facilities planner, interactive board and glass revolver all from one supplier.

With the effort our partners are making in supplier consolidation, we believe this is a key competitive advantage for us AND we actually make the products ourselves, not outsource the production like many competitors in our space.

“ As we develop our strategic plan for the coming years, supporting the shift to digital is mission critical to our business and our resellers ”

We provide supply chain flexibility. Our customers can purchase our products from our strategic wholesale partners throughout the world, direct from our domestic warehouses in certain markets, or in full containers as their business dictates.

Last but not least, I believe our marketing support has significantly improved over the past 18 months. We can provide best-in-class digital content including targeted videos, 'how to choose' landing pages, segmented email campaigns, relevant blogs for their own websites, as well as training for their salesforce, either live or through webinars.

OPI: What other moves are you making to prepare Bi-silque and your customers for the future?

BW: As we develop our strategic plan for the coming years, supporting the shift to digital is mission critical to our business and our resellers. We started this digital transformation a few years ago, but identified the need to rapidly increase its adoption. From the automation of key business functions to stay as lean as possible, to creating best in class content for our partners, Bi-silque will lead the way in this regard within our sector.

We realise the need to also adapt our global trading plan to fulfil the needs of our growing online customer base, as well as implement these initiatives to maintain our competitive advantage in the global viscom market. These investments are both system and human capital related.

The addition of Danny Berendsen to our team as our Head of Global Digital Transformation Strategy will provide us with in-house expertise to rapidly build out our strategy. He will focus on moving much of our offline initiatives online through category management, content management, online trading plans and digital marketing activities.



Bi-silque's new custom board solution specifically designed for use in vertical markets

HEALTHCARE SUCCESS!

Bi-silque recently launched a custom board programme and website which helps resellers easily create and sell these products into vertical markets.

The healthcare market, for example, has significant demand for these types of products and has already created its first success story.

WB Mason Regional Sales Manager Bryan Vanalstine says:

"MasterVision was instrumental in creating a solution for a key hospital account for us. Their custom board solution, graphic design capabilities, quality and quick shipment made this a seamless transaction for WB Mason and our end user. We were able to supply these new boards for several areas including intensive care and the maternity ward of this hospital network."

Bi-silque's custom board website offers easy-to-use templates for healthcare, sports and industrial applications. Graphic design assistance is also available to dealers to help cater for any unique customer requirements.

OPI: Are there any standout markets for you in terms of growth and opportunity?

BW: This year we are focused on growing our core markets and execution of the business. France is certainly one of the markets where our business is growing rapidly, but there is more to be accomplished. Nordic countries are showing strong growth, and we now have our first major partner in Australia. As stated before, the US business continues to be very strong and we will work hard on the implementation of our new partnerships with the major US buying groups.

OPI: Finally, what does the future hold for Bi-silque?

BW: Our future is a bright one as we push to accomplish our mission of helping people to communicate! We understand the challenges of our resellers and are clear in our objectives to help them overcome those in our categories. Our teams are motivated and energised as we push our organisation to the next level. Throughout our building you can see our 2017 mantra 'Because We Can'...

It's our belief, our mission and our goal to be the world leader in visual communication products.

Beth Wright is the Chief Commercial Officer for Bi-silque

