

INNOVATION

LE CRENEAU INDUSTRIEL IS PREPARING ITS ROBOT

LE CRENEAU INDUSTRIEL COULD QUICKLY EXPAND, WITH THE MARKET LAUNCH OF NEW INNOVATIVE MACHINES, INCLUDING ACROBOT, ITS CNC-CONTROLLED ROBOT.

Almost 40 years after its beginnings in Annecy (Haute-Savoie, France), Le Créneau Industriel (which means Industrial Niche in French) is still riding the waves of changes in the aeronautics industry at the beginning of this century. Specializing in the design and manufacturing of CNC machines, the company has positioned itself on niche markets, starting with the trimming and drilling of a stack of aluminum sheets. Leveraging its first innovation, which does away with the screwing and unscrewing of parts, productivity has been improved exponentially. This has generated sales of about 50 machines, beginning with Dassault, its first customer.



FIRST US SALES

The company then went on to open the doors of the North American market, with a machine that is used for multi-drilling of jet engine nacelles composite parts. Success followed, with about 15 machines sold to customers such as General Electric and UTC. “Since we win over new customers through innovation and we keep them by providing local support, we decided to set up our first US subsidiary in 2015. We will be creating another one in China this year”, says Laurent Combaz, President of Le Créneau Industriel.

Continuing to innovate, Le Créneau Industriel then designed a mixed process for milling and ultrasonic cutting of honeycomb parts. The first machine was sold to Airbus China five years ago. Another 10 or so machines have been sold since and this figure could increase quite quickly. The company has in fact developed, for aluminum honeycomb panels used on satellites, an orbital drilling

WORKING TOGETHER

In the meantime, the company is applying for about €1m in aid from the FUI, a special French inter-ministry fund, which it hopes to receive by the end of August 2016. Working with two other Haute-Savoie partners, Precise (spindles and effectors) and Carbilly (cutting tools), it is also creating links with a French composite parts manufacturer that has not yet been publicly identified. This company in fact wants to see if it could transfer some its production to the Acrobot robot, thus avoiding having to dislocate to a country with lower labor costs.

“We’re also working on a new machining process that could be optimized on robots. This could allow us to spin out different Acrobot configurations with higher levels of precision. It would then also be possible to machine hard metals such as steel and titanium. Our timeline for these systems is currently at two to three years,” adds Laurent Combaz.

All these developments will certainly have a strong impact on the growth of sales, which are forecast to grow from €11m in 2015 to €22m in five years. At the same time, headcount is expected to rise to 80 people (the company currently has 45 employees). Facilities are also scheduled to be enlarged, with the company’s current 2000 sq. m. plant being replaced with a 2500 sq. m. site. The floor surface could even be doubled, if needed. Construction of this facility would require investments of €3m.

■ **Olivier Constant**

FACTS and FIGURES (2015)

Company created in
1978

45 employees

Sales **€11m**

1 location in France:
Annecy

2 subsidiaries:

- US
- China (in 2016)