

Flexible concrete for safer roads

(Ref: TTT 0930)

The Belgian precast concrete company Omnibeton has used the IRC network to find exactly the kind of innovative product they needed to counteract a decline in their traditional market. They have licensed the Delta Bloc safety barrier system from Delta Bloc Europa in Austria. This is enabling Omnibeton to grow turnover again, while providing Delta Bloc with a valuable new outlet for their technology.

With over 40,000 Europeans killed and 1.7 million injured in road accidents every year, the need for road safety measures is clear. And when accidents do happen, we appreciate how important it is for the vehicles involved to be contained within their own carriageway. Vehicles that crash through barriers can cause many additional injuries, by colliding with traffic coming in the opposite direction, by careering off the side of the road or plunging from a bridge.

The precast concrete suppliers MABA of Austria have created a subsidiary company, Delta Bloc Europa, to market their specialised Delta Bloc safety barrier internationally. In one particular deal, the IRC network has helped bring the technology to Belgium.

Unique advantages

"The unique thing about Delta Bloc is that it is flexible, unlike standard rigid concrete barriers," says Mathias Redlberger, manager of Delta Bloc Europa. He explains that individual concrete elements containing internal steel are linked by strong couplings. This creates what is in one sense a flexible steel chain but with a rigid concrete exterior to each element.

The unique construction method allows the advantages of steel and of concrete to be combined within one system. The flexibility assists in absorbing shock and promoting more controlled deceleration of

any vehicle that collides with the barrier. And the modular design of linked units also promotes flexibility in the other sense of the word - allowing barriers to be constructed to suit any location, and facilitating easy transport to the site.

The Delta Bloc system fulfils the requirements of European Standard EN 1317 for road restraint systems, and other relevant standards. Being able to fulfil these requirements with a system that is flexible, in both senses, is a key selling point for Delta Bloc. Other important factors are that it is economical to produce and is readily assembled without complex construction methods.



Delta Bloc's flexible safety barrier has undergone rigorous testing

A quick agreement

MABA attracted the attention of IRC Austria when it won an innovation award for the Lower Austria region. When IRC Austria contacted MABA to offer their services, the company became interested in using the IRC network to search for new partners throughout Europe.

Details of the technology were publicised throughout the network, attracting the interest of the precast concrete supplier Omnibeton, a client of IRC Flanders in Belgium.

"The EN 1317 standard was not compulsory in Belgium until quite

Success Story

recently,” says Johnny Kellens, administrator of Omnibeton, explaining one of the factors that made his company interested in Delta Bloc.

With the assistance of IRC Flanders, Frank Peeters, Omnibeton’s owner, and Kellens were soon able to meet Mathias Redlberger in Belgium to discuss possible cooperation. A few weeks later they were in Austria to sign a deal allowing them to manufacture and sell Delta Bloc in Belgium.

This has given Omnibeton a significant competitive advantage in their own market, now that compliance with EN 1317 is obligatory in Belgium.

An engine for growth

“We now have only two or three competitors in this area, where previously we had about 25 to 30,” says Kellens. “So this technology transfer from Austria is proving very important for us.”

He explains that the market in Omnibeton’s traditional areas, focused on low-tech concrete applications, had been getting increasingly difficult, with many competitors leading to falling profit margins. To combat this downturn, the company had been looking for new high-tech products for some years, but without success.

“Now with Delta Bloc we have found it,” says Kellens, “because it is a high-end specialised product with better margins.” Emphasising where these higher profit margins come from, he comments: “Delta Bloc Europa invested a lot of money in developing this line of products, which we could never do on our own. And probably no other precast concrete company in Belgium could, even with the right idea.

But most important, now it means we don’t just sell concrete, we really sell safety!”

The Delta Bloc deal has allowed Omnibeton to keep out of difficult times and return to steady growth. The company expects Delta Bloc to be “the most important engine driving future growth in turnover.”

This is the first time that Omnibeton has imported technology from another country, and the deal is also the first time that either Omnibeton or MABA have used the IRC network. Both companies are interested in making further use of the IRC in future.

IRC contacts:

Austria

Kurt Burtscher
IRC Austria - FFG (EIP)
 phone +43 5 7755 4701
 kurt.burtscher@ffg.at
<http://www.irca.at/>

Belgium

Magali Parent
IRC Flanders
 phone +32 2 209 09 60
 mpa@iwt.be
<http://www.iwt.be/irc/>

Company contacts:

Mathias Redlberger
Delta Bloc Europa
 phone +43 2622 400 141
 mathias.redlberger@maba.at
<http://www.deltabloc.com/>

Johnny Kellens
Omnibeton
 phone +32 11 211 461
 info@omnibeton.be
<http://www.omnibeton.be/>