

QUALITY IS KEY FOR C&K FITZPATRICK

QUALITY OF PRODUCT IS KEY TO WEATHERING THE STORM OF THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN OVER THE PAST YEAR.

Like almost every other business here, Kildare-based conveyor specialists C & K Fitzpatrick's have certainly felt the effects of the recession. But, according to managing director Ken Fitzpatrick, they are becoming cautiously optimistic about the future despite the harsh working environment.

Ken and his son Mark, a fellow director of what is still very much a family business, believes that this is because they have stuck to the principles that have helped the company to thrive for more than 40 years.

"We've always prided ourselves on providing quality products and a quality service" explains Ken. "Although the rubber market became much tougher

when the recession kicked in, we were determined never to lose our reputation for quality and value". Mark is quick to agree. "When times get hard it's a temptation to try and compete by offering lower priced, lower quality products," says Mark. "We've had to cut costs like everybody else, but we have worked hard with our suppliers and they have backed us up fully. This has led to some great savings on the original high grade products."

Another influencing factor is that Fitzpatrick's are long-standing official distributors for three of the biggest quality brand names in the conveyor industry – Dunlop for conveyor belting, Flexible Steel Lacing Co (Flexco) for belt fasteners and cleaners and Sandvik

(formerly Gurtec) who provide industry leading conveyor rollers.

Ken believes, it's a question of honesty and integrity. "You can't spend years telling your customers that your products are the best, which we honestly believe they are, and then suddenly start saying the same about lower priced alternatives. In my experience, the price reflects the quality and our customers know that too".

"It's a matter of working smarter to achieve savings," said Mark "The downturn has hit hard and things will remain tough for some time yet, but it is also an opportunity to check that there are no hidden costs or unnecessary maintenance." C&K Fitzpatrick actively work with their customers to look at applications and problems to ensure that the entire conveyor package delivers maximum value.

The Ultimate Solution?

Fitzpatrick's continue to play to their strengths by focussing on the 'quality end' of the market supplying the more specialised high-performance belting. "We tend to sell solutions rather than just long lengths of black rubber".

Exceeding the Standards

Although most conveyor belt manufacturers manufacture to the relevant DIN and BS specifications, Dunlop has always taken a different path by developing belts based upon the principle of longest possible lifetime and lowest cost per ton. This invariably means that Dunlop belts far exceed



the minimum required standards. For example, Dunlop's RA standard cover grade not only exceeds the normal DIN Y standard but also the higher DIN X for abrasion resistance.

This was put into further perspective following an extensive testing regime put in place by Dunlop. They looked at hundreds of samples across many manufacturers and were surprised with the results. "We expected a DIN Y belt to meet DIN Y in the majority of cases, however this was not always what was happening. We found that many of the lower priced belts failed to meet even the basic DIN standards," explains Dunlop's head of application engineering, Sytze Brouwers.

Not quite what it seems

This problem with standards remains a constant headache in the conveyor belting market. Unscrupulous manufacturers and traders have been known to sell belting as one standard, even though the product does not actually achieve that standard. Without sophisticated laboratory testing equipment it is often impossible to differentiate these belts. "Usually the belt

arrives on site and looks fine but after a few months the problems start showing up," added Mark. "Some people don't even realize that this shouldn't happen!"

In Mark's opinion, this problem is generally confined to the lower priced OEM end of the market and traders where belts are often sold unbranded. However, last year Dunlop were forced to take the unusual step of warning the market about misrepresentation. They had been finding more and more cases where their customers believed that they had been supplied with genuine Dunlop belts but which, in reality, had actually been manufactured elsewhere and were invariably of inferior quality or below the required specification. Dunlop naturally took this very seriously. It does, however, indicate the high standing of the brand and the reputation for quality that the Dunlop name evokes.

Total Service

Another reason for Fitzpatrick's continued success is their wide range of services including the fitting, vulcanizing and maintaining of belts, cleaners, drum lagging and even assessment and consultancy services. Providing

this total service using a close-knit team of dedicated staff who are highly experienced is clearly a key advantage that they hold over many of their rivals.

Both Ken and Mark remain positive about the future. "We have been very encouraged by the market in recent months" says Ken. "More and more customers are returning after bad experiences elsewhere, which makes us even more convinced that choosing to follow the quality path has been the right choice".

C&K Fitzpatrick invites all Machinery Movers readers to visit their leading manufactures at the following stands at Hillhead:-

- Dunlop Conveyor Belting – Stand P41 Main Pavilion
- Flexco Belt Fasteners & Cleaners – Stand P104 Pavilion
- Sandvik Conveyor Rollers & Screening – Stand J1 Outdoors

For More information contact C&K Fitzpatrick on

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