

BARTLETT BLINDS TURNS UP THE VOLUME

Bartlett Blinds continues to reinforce its position as a leading Australian external blind maker, amid ongoing moves to promote its growing capacity, expand its geographical reach and streamline its product offer.

BELINDA SMART REPORTS.



Established over half a century ago in the regional Victorian centre of Ballarat, Bartlett Blinds is renowned as a specialist in window coverings, in particular awnings and clear and tinted plastic blinds.

What may be less apparent to some however is that the company is just one sub-brand of a much larger entity, C.E. Bartlett, which operates a number of divisions, manufacturing for diverse sectors including safety & defence, recreational products, wineries, agriculture and transportation.

The stand out manufacturing capacity of this parent company has been a key factor in Bartlett Blinds' concerted re-positioning in recent years, managing director Keith Bartlett confirms.

ONGOING EFFICIENCIES AND IMPROVED CAPACITY

"We're continuing a drive to reinforce our strengths to the market," says Bartlett. "This lies in our ability to multi-skill employees from the wider company and utilise staff from a wide range of divisions, which means that we can offer the right product to the market at the right time."

A flexible approach to staffing also enables the company to respond quickly to seasonal changes; while Bartlett Blinds typically employs around 25 staff, it is also able to leverage the 100 strong staff base at C.E. Bartlett in peak periods. "In the busy season from September to March we can increase production to ensure customers' rapid turnaround requirements are fulfilled."

The company's staff retention levels are also good, a great advantage in this industry, says Bartlett. "We have skilled staff members who've been with us for over a decade and in some cases 20 years and higher. One employee has been with us over 45 years!"

"Bartlett Blinds is currently up-skilling our staff and integrating new machinery into its production processes in order to improve efficiencies and turnaround times" he adds.

"Our factories currently house three computerised cutters plus our new ultrasonic cutter at the Blinds division, installed earlier this year. As a company we have at our disposal over 20 welders ranging from hot air, hot wedge, high frequency and thermal bar welders. We also utilise more than 30 sewing machines ranging from straight stitching to automated seaming and hemming machines. We

have also implemented a fully integrated ERP software system that utilises the latest technologies to improve manufacturing efficiencies.”

With 1600 square metres of production floor space, Bartlett Blinds is capable of producing well over 100 blinds per day, which guarantees swift turnaround of orders. Combined with the other Bartlett factories, the company has over 8,000 square metres of production space.

“In the last two years our production capacity has increased 30 per cent. Our growth strategy will see this figure increase a further 30 per cent in the coming two years.

“This production capacity means we’re proud to be able to work with production times of no more than two weeks for standard products,” says Bartlett.

NEW RETAIL STRATEGY

Manufacturing efficiencies resulting in greater output have allowed the company to focus on driving retail sales and envisage new strategies in this regard, confirms national sales & marketing manager Scott Norman.

Norman says the past 12 to 18 months have seen the company consolidating its retailer base in its home state of Victoria. From 2013 and throughout the rest of 2014 and beyond, its planned focus is on expansion into the NSW and SA markets.

As well as increasing its geographic spread interstate, the company’s sales strategy has shifted. “While the number of

retailers representing the brand hasn’t altered much, the nature of those retailers is changing. Our approach is very much about ensuring that Bartlett Blinds is represented by authorised retailers that can support the brand and sell the product in significant volumes.”

“We are now also able to support our retailers effectively, focusing on regular one-on-one meetings conducted by our sales representatives. They’ll usually book meetings with our retailers in late August/September before the busy season kicks off, and then follow up with them at the end of the season, around early March. In addition there is daily support through our customer service team.”

“Another innovation we’ve introduced as part of our focus on supporting retailers is our web portal, established around 12 months ago and now working extremely well. It includes order forms, price lists, calculator tools and a range of other features to help stores sell and process orders efficiently.”

Meanwhile, Bartlett Blinds’ website has also had a face lift, with a refreshed version launched just before Christmas 2013, featuring enhanced imagery and more in-depth product information. At the time of writing, the company is also preparing to launch a new product brochure, re-badged to reflect C.E. Bartlett’s corporate branding. Norman says the branding is no accident; “It’s about reminding people that while Bartlett Blinds is a specialist manufacturer in the window furnishings sector, it also has the financial and infrastructure backing of a much larger company.”



WELDING PLASTIC

PRODUCT RATIONALISATION

Bartlett Blinds' traditional product range has included almost all styles of external awnings that are available in the broader marketplace.

Whilst the company will continue to offer great variety, MD Keith Bartlett says the company is currently on a drive to streamline its product offer. "Our current focus is very much about streamlining our ranges to focus on what we do well and what represents the bulk of our customers' needs being Auto Sunblinds, Straight drop geared and spring loaded styles, wire guide, fixed guide and motorised options.

As a result, the company is gradually phasing out older products and focusing on newer styles.

"For example our spring loaded, straight drop blinds are gradually replacing the old cord and pulley model. And our new Alfresco blinds are replacing the older style wall track blinds."

Meanwhile, a new product line is set for launch in July this year. Full details of the range are yet to be released, but Bartlett confirms it will take the form of a popular and proven style of product. The release will reflect Bartlett Blinds' standing as a leader within the industry that is also responsive to the needs of the market, he says.

"All the work we've been doing in recent years has been designed to make the most of our position as an expert in the external window coverings field that is also in the unusual position of being backed by an entity with impressive capacity at its disposal. Our move into new territories, increased focus to build our authorised reseller base and an ever more streamlined and relevant product range, backed by a skilled and flexible workforce, are all integral to this ongoing strategy."

"The message we want to get across is that Bartlett Blinds has leading edge expertise in Australian made blind manufacturing, with an ongoing commitment to improving the product and service we can offer the market."



STRIPED AUTO



STRAIGHT DROP GEARED BLINDS



WIRE GUIDE BLINDS