

Bext: 25 Years, and Just RF

SUPPLY SIDE

Bext recently noted its 25th anniversary. Radio World Editor in Chief Paul McLane touched base with Dennis Pieri, its founder, CEO and majority shareholder.

RW: How did the company come about?

Pieri: I was a radio broadcaster from 1975 to 1985; I owned and managed an FM station. I got into it initially because of my love for music and programming; however, I became interested in RF, in part because I found it fascinating and in part because I realized that in order to understand certain aspects of broadcasting, I really needed to become personally familiar with RF rather than delegating it all. Becoming hands-on also allowed me to save some money. I didn't have a school background in engineering.

I kept thinking that an RF company catering to broadcasters' RF needs would have more credibility if it was managed by an ex-broadcaster. So in 1985 I decided to give it a try and Bext was born.

I was working with an attorney whom I hired to form the corporation, and we needed a name. I kept coming up with names that I liked, but to our dismay, all of them were taken. It was almost comical. Finally, I started playing with random letters and creating "names" that way. When I got to B-E-X-T, it was not taken. So we picked that one. Few people ever asked if Bext was an acronym or if it meant something specific. Actually, it was neither.

RW: Who are the other top managers and what are your areas of manufacturing?

Pieri: The CFO is my partner Claudio Tilesi. The operations manager is Paola Fregoso. The chief engineer and engineering staff manager is Luca Borgnetto.

We are an RF company. This includes just about every possible different flavor of broadcast transmitters, meaning transmitters of any power level up to 35 kW, exciters, translators and boosters for FM radio and television, microwave STLs for radio, a wide selection of virtually any possible variation of FM radio antennas, and an always growing business in RF filters and RF combiners for FM radio of all power levels. We intentionally never try to be too many things to too many people. We just concentrate on RF, and leave everything else to others.

RW: What's your geographic base and where do you sell products?"



The Bext team, from left: Tino Romagnoli, Claudio Tilesi, Paula Matthews, Melanie Lococo, Dennis Pieri, Tom Troland, Paola Fregoso, Mark Hoffman and Luca Borgnetto.

Pieri: Bext is a California corporation and has always been. We are still based in central San Diego. The majority of our sales are in North America — United States, Canada and Mexico — but we do sell on a regular basis also in other parts of the world. Recently, we have had good sales into Africa, Asia and South America.

RW: What is your most notable recent product introduction?

Pieri: The best and brightest new products are the XL and FB lines of FM radio transmitters, which are remarkable for their efficiency and compact size. We have yet to see a competitor's product that is as efficient in terms of power consumption and as compact in size.

The reason overall size of transmit-

ters is slowly becoming a factor is that space inside mountaintop shelters for broadcast transmitters is limited, so it comes at a premium. Many broadcasters are renting space. If you can have the same power in a transmitter half the size, it usually costs less in rent. Even for those stations who own their own transmitter site, it is beneficial to use less space so they have room left over to rent out or to use for other equipment.

RW: What trends do you see in talking to engineers that reflect how the industry is changing?

Pieri: As far as RF, the main trend is what for lack of better definition we'll call "going green." Essentially, everyone is becoming more interested in lower power consumption. Another

trend is multiple FM stations joining forces and using a single broadband antenna system to broadcast more than one frequency. Most of our antennas are broadband, and we sell RF combiners, exactly for this purpose.

RW: Bext is a dealer for FMeXtra. What is your assessment of the success of that technology?

Pieri: FMeXtra technology is amazing. It continues to evolve, with more and more sophisticated algorithms, which allows a higher number of higher quality digital audio channels. FMeXtra can now also broadcast images and video on an FM radio subcarriers.

Unfortunately, while from a pure technology standpoint FMeXtra is fantastic and becoming more so every year, it hasn't met as much success as it deserves in the marketplace. We feel that there is a mistaken perception where broadcasters erroneously feel that they have to go either with HD Radio (IBOC) or with FMeXtra; and since HD Radio is of course promoted much more powerfully than FMeXtra, station owners go with HD Radio and disregard FMeXtra.

This is really a misperception. While they are both digital, HD Radio and FMeXtra are two different things which serve two different purposes. Unlike HD Radio, FMeXtra is a digital subcarrier that is injected into the analog carrier, and it really should be seen more as a modern-day version of the older analog SCA subcarriers. Also, a little known fact is that HD Radio and FMeXtra can actually coexist on the same station. So, it's really not a matter of one against the other, or having to pick one vs. the other.

For more information about Bext, visit www.bext.com.