

MORE THAN A WHOLESALER

Torque hopped across the North Sea to visit pgb-Europe's newly expanded warehouse and talk through the company's latest period of growth with Product and Marketing Manager, **Johannes Heye**...



pgb's range of Hapax wood screws for professional use

Situated in the quiet Belgian town of Melle, East Flanders, pgb-Europe has been gathering pace over the last couple of years in a period of significant investment and growth for the firm.

At its headquarters, the introduction of a new 5,000 m² fully automated warehouse and ERP system, not to mention the launch of a new webshop and app, has kept Heye and the rest of the pgb team's hands full. Adding a new joint venture factory in Vietnam and the building of a brand-new production plant in Zabrze, Poland, into the mix too, has culminated in an extremely busy time for the wholesaler.

Established in 1956 as a family-owned business, pgb moved to its current headquarters in Melle in 1997, and over the years has established itself as a market-leading fastener wholesaler for the Benelux. Boasting a company turnover in the region of nearly €35 million last year, the firm saw 80% of its distribution sales occur in the Benelux region while 20% went to other countries around the world.

"2018 was a special year for pgb as we launched our new ERP system, warehouse management software and a new webshop," Heye explains. "So yes, we were happy we could manage this all, but the integration of the SAP was quite a hard period for the first four months. Now, we are at the dawn of a lot of new possibilities on an IT level to mainstream all the needs of our customers and be able to work in a very efficient way."

// 2018 was a special year for pgb as we launched our new ERP system, warehouse management software and a new webshop. //

However, pgb is not content with being just a supplier. According to Heye, the firm's goal is to evolve to become more than just a wholesaler, and instead act as a partner to its customers in seeking a, "long-term relationship with a clear-win situation."

While also implementing vertical integration in the supply chain to one step higher (manufacturing), the company has focused innovation on a number of its product ranges, pouring significant resources and investment in to three key areas: fasteners, fixings and woodscrews.

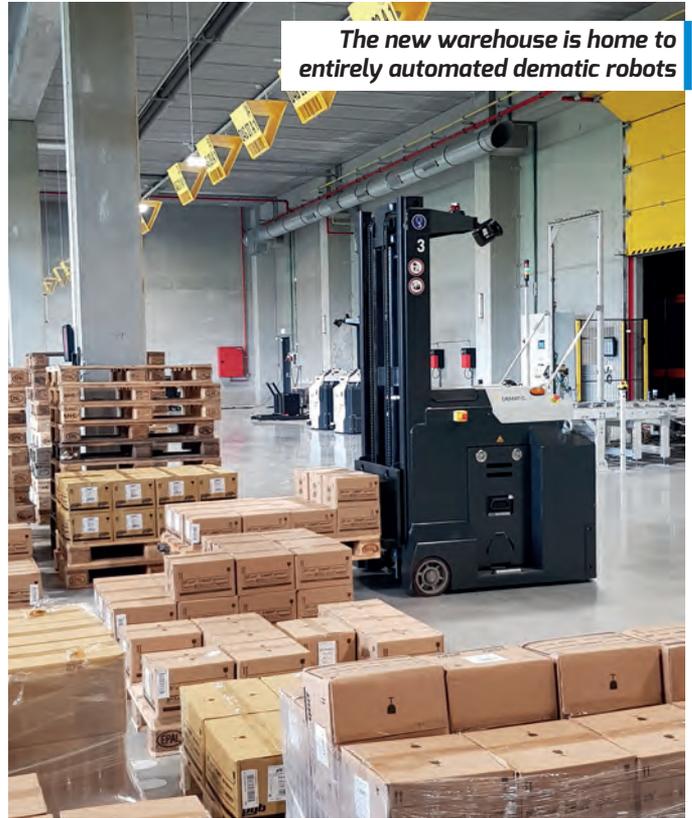
Regarding fasteners, pgb has extended its range of bolts to include the SB Bolts, HR and HV assemblies, all of which feature CE marking and meet the ISO standard for both bolts (ISO 4014/17) and nuts (ISO 4032;DoP nr). The SB Bolts are available with pgb's new zinc plated Cr3+ coating or are alternatively available with a hot dip galvanised coating.

The entire range features a hot dip galvanised coating and is TÜV audited and certified (0780-CPR-172114), ranging from M12-M30. The accompanying washer for pre-loaded bolting, the HV Hexagonal nut, is also CE marked, certified to EN 14399-4.

Another of pgb's recent product innovations came as a result of purchasing what is now known as pgb-Polska in 2016; an 8000 m² anchor production facility based in Southern Poland. "Anchors are an important group for us," explains Heye.



pgb produces its anchor range in the new Poland facility



“We now produce by ourselves through the new factory so there is always a lot of focus and priority on that. There is definitely potential in this market.”

This year, pgb has been working on an extended range of insulation plugs under its Smart range, manufactured in the new Poland facility. Starting with the S-IPT 8/p, this fixing screws in and can take the form of a reinforced synthetic screw with a double expansion zone of 35 mm and 65 mm for optimal hold and flexibility in all materials.

The S-IPT 8/s metal screw with plastic cap has the same dimensions and push-through installation for use in non-bearing layers, while the S-IPH 10 hammered-in fixing provides good pull-out resistance and short installation time. Also featured in the range is the STY anchor, a special threaded insulation plug to fix light objects to external installation.

“In Poland we produce plastic anchors but within the whole product group we have different areas of focus, such as standard plugs, hammer nail plugs, construction plugs and insulation plugs, which is where our focus is at the moment,” says Heye. “We want to be a top competitor in this market and although it may be a long road to get there, we see a lot of potential.”

Pgb has also been working on a number of European Technical Assessments (ETAs) on its plastic, metal and bonded anchors. The firm’s technical department offers daily assistance to customers and



// The biggest growth for the company over the last 10 years has been woodscrews, this is a very important market for us. //

engineering companies for the calculation of anchorages, with a new module of its SMART Anchor Calculation Programme soon to be launched for post-installed rebar connections.

The final area of focus for pgb currently is woodscrews; namely, the firm’s new Hapax brand launched out of its recent joint venture factory in Vietnam. pgb opened the 20,000 m² factory at the end of 2016, home to 85 heading and threading machines which have a production capacity of more than 500 tonnes a month.

Hapax products are designed in Belgium by pgb and then manufactured in the Vietnam factory, and with two patents pending, woodscrews are clearly a big market for the firm.

“The biggest growth for the company over the last 10 years has been woodscrews, we feel this is a very important market for us,” offers Heye. “The factory in Vietnam manufactures our woodscrews to strict dimensional, mechanical and metallurgical quality standards, and our local office in Shanghai provides a daily contact for suppliers, which are chosen by our Belgium HQ.”

The new Hapax range for professional use can be used in all wood applications from general joinery to wood construction and fittings, thanks to the patented triple-thread point. This feature drastically decreases wood splitting in delicate applications and significantly reduces screw-in





pgb's showroom showcases the firm's complete range

prove we made the correct choice with our investments. It's been a good year so far as a result, and we are aiming for a growth of 20% for this year, which should happen."

Heye hopes this growth will be aided by the introduction of the company's new webshop, which enables customers to order directly through the website through viewing and interacting with the online catalogue.

The ecommerce platform allows customers to conveniently check stocks, order and reorder any amount of product through an easy-to-use, intuitive online platform. Customers have their own accounts through the site to make ordering and reordering from saved lists easy, with some having been provided with scanners to make this process even quicker and more convenient.

"There is also an impersonation feature, so our representatives can log in and place orders directly for a customer; alternatively if a customer is a central buying person then with one login they can order for however many shops they wish, which saves a lot of time," Heye explains.

Launched hand-in-hand with the new webshop is pgb's new app, available on iOS and Android, which provides mobile access to the webshop to further increase convenience for its customers. The app has a function which allows the phone's camera to scan a product barcode when placing an order, taking a fraction of the



// Through our webshop we hope to forge and keep strong links with our customers and provide them a great service. //

time. The webshop and app are integrated, so customers can use the same login details and switch between the two platforms for their ease.

"We have had very good feedback," says Heye. "One customer even said it would start to become a hobby to place an order through the app, so that was good to hear. That's one of the last things that we have done, and it works perfectly together with the website."

Customers can also access an overview of their orders and back orders through both platforms and can even make their own individually tailored catalogues based on their order preferences, saved lists and favourite items.

"People are asking for service," Heye adds. "If you want to be ready for the future then you have to invest in technology as it is evolving faster and faster. Through our webshop we hope to forge and keep strong links with our customers and provide them a great service. Making the industry smarter, and being smart, is an important thing."

According to Heye, pgb is looking towards a period of consolidation in the near future, now that the business' evolution over the last few years has been completed: "We remain very ambitious for the future and see it as bright; we will work hard to be a one-stop solution for both the product and technical service towards our customers."

www.pgb-europe.com/en-gb

→ torque, and in partnership with an optimised thread allows faster screwing-in while providing high pull-out values. Milling ribs further reduce tension on the screw shaft and head, making the screws more suitable for use with electric screwdrivers and other impact hand tools.

“Impact screwdrivers are nice to work with and are convenient, but something has to take the power and if it’s not your arm or the drill bit, then it’s the screw,” reasons Heye. “This is why we promote our Hapax screws because the geometry is designed to deal much better with the extra strain put on them by impact tools and are much more suited to this kind of application.”

pgb also includes a free bit in each box of Hapax screws, so that the two products fit together perfectly and prevent the screw from failing. “We feel this is really convenient for the customer,” continues Heye. “The bit just has to last for one box and then the user will get another one with the next box they buy, so they will always have a drill bit to hand. This is what we learnt from talking to our customers, especially in special applications or when using impact screwdrivers, so we decided to include the bit as a free gadget to make sure our customers always have what they need.”

The firm has also invested heavily in its headquarter facilities, in particular the expansion of its automated warehouse, which can now stock a total of 28,000

// To be ready for the future there is not much choice but to invest in technology, creating a ‘smart industry’ is an important thing. //

pallet places thanks to a 14 m storage height and 5,000 m² footprint. The investments in automation has enabled more than 7,000 order lines to be processed each day.

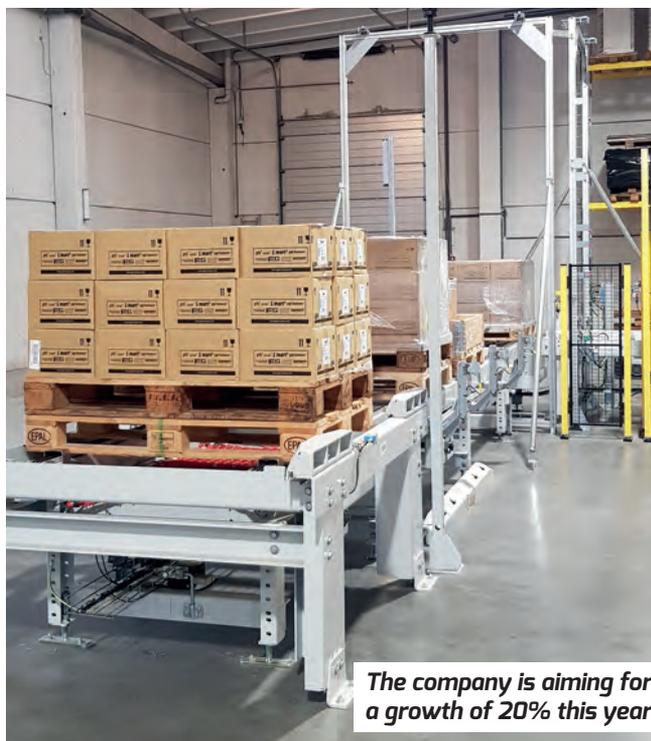
More than 10 years on from its first investment in automation back in 2007 with a miniload warehouse, pgb has completed its latest growth venture in impressive fashion. Fully operational since October last year, the new warehouse is home to entirely automated Dematic robots which pick, transport and sort stock without any human interference.

A new ERP system was also installed as part of the investment in a bid to improve customer service and warehouse optimisation. “In the warehouse we wanted to achieve more with the same people through the investment,” Heye explains. “To be ready for the future there is not much choice but to invest in technology, therefore creating a ‘smart industry’ is an important thing. Investing in both transparency and technology to track where orders are, how long they will take, if they are already on the road and so on, are all things we are integrating into our applications.”

While it was quite a task implementing both features into the new warehouse at the same time, Heye believes it has been worth it: “We were very ambitious,” he admits. “Now, we are good for capacity and it’s up to us to sell more this year and



The investments enable more than 7,000 order lines to be processed each day



The company is aiming for a growth of 20% this year