



EQUIPMENT

by the bucketload

Berdal, based in the Netherlands, supports the lucrative European construction industry with a comprehensive range of project equipment and materials. Celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2022, Berdal's Commercial Director, Eugene van den Broek, reflected on the journey that took the company from a humble reseller of rubber mallets, to an award-winning Dutch conglomerate with representation in all of Europe's biggest construction retailers. Report by Richard Hagan.

Berdal Rubber & Plastics is a family-owned producer and brand owner, specialising in manufacturing high-quality, durable plastic and rubber products for the professional construction and consumer DIY markets.

There are five strong brands currently sold under the Berdal umbrella, namely: Gripline, Pandser, Premiumfol, Fento, and KonVox.

The Pandser and Premiumfol catalogues offer a variety of construction industry-specific products, including technical

films and tapes, EPDM products, and lead substitutes for roofs, gutters and facades.

Its Fento brand of ergonomic knee protectors is a rising star. Fento, combined with Premiumfol and KonVox, currently constitute 40% of Berdal's turnover.

Gripline is Berdal's biggest brand by turnover. Boasting 60% of the company's sales, the Gripline range of buckets and tubs is an extremely important portfolio for Berdal. This range includes buckets and tubs of various shapes and sizes, as well as knee protectors and rubber prod-

ucts such as mallets, plungers, and various consumables.

One of Berdal's newest brands, KonVox specialises in high-quality load securing products, and is marketed for its ability to protect people from loose materials during transport.

Building the business

Berdal was established in 1972 as a small DIY-style equipment dealer, selling a modest range of rubber mallets and various other small tools. In time, the owner (the father

of Berdal's current owner), identified a business opportunity to begin manufacturing buckets and tubs himself - a category that at the time he was simply reselling.

He purchased a machine to handle the production, kickstarting a wave of very rapid growth. Within a few years, the company expanded into the production of branded products.

In 1997, the company opened a manufacturing subsidiary in Poland. Then in 2016, the management of the company switched hands to the family's second generation. This saw a reinvigoration of the company's strategy, with a greater focus on branding along with more sophisticated marketing techniques. Consumers had grown up and had themselves become more sophisti-

cated. This new strategy would be the company's attempt to reach them. It worked.

"Our investments in marketing have gone very well," confirmed Eugene van den Broek, the company's Commercial Director. "We've enjoyed 100% growth over the past five years and we expect the same growth for the next five."

Sophisticated selling

The company's core philosophy is all about offering a range of products that the market demands, at a quality level and price point intentionally designed to ensure success. Sold via resellers, Berdal supports the reseller with data and in-store assets.

"Our whole strategy focuses on added values like innovation, sustainability, logistics services and data management," Mr van den Broek explained. "We only do business with the big chains in Europe across all sectors, and we focus on offering very specific product combinations in each region and market."

In Berdal's early days, the company's approach to in-store merchandising was fairly traditional: put the items on a shelf and hope for the best. But today, things are very different. Berdal products are now



BERDAL | PROFILE



carefully selected to suit a specific reseller's particular market using a number of data points the company maintains internally.

Those products are then displayed in their own sophisticated presentation area inside the reseller, sometimes known as a 'shop-in-a-shop'. Next, Berdal ensures that the store's staff are comprehensively prepared to sell its products.

"We support the shops with sales training for the sales staff, training them how to sell and present our products. We ensure that we provide them with the right advice and ultimately also the margin to ensure that they're motivated to succeed," said Mr van den Broek.

Unlike its competitors, Berdal also offers its resellers a competitive advantage in its logistics capacity.

"In many of our regions, we send the products directly to the customer's shops, thus skipping the customer's distribution network and saving them all of those costs," revealed Mr van den Broek. "Internally, it requires a lot from our own processes to make that work, but it's what we do and it adds a lot of value to our customers."

Peak plastic production efficiency

Berdal has two production sites feeding its distribution network. Its Netherlands facility employs 50 people while its Polish site employs 25.

"The reason we're so successful is due to the fact that our production lines are

highly automated," Mr van den Broek highlighted. "Buckets and tubs are high-volume, low-cost commodity products, so automation is very important. We can reach customer excellence and cost leadership at the same time."

The company owns 18 production machines, with a further four to be added to its Polish facility in summer 2022.

Mr van den Broek explained that in order to ensure resellers are kept well-stocked and its direct clients don't run out of equipment, Berdal's production lines never stop.

"We run 24 hours a day, 365 days a year using five shifts. And even then, we don't have enough capacity because, as the market leader in Europe, there's still a lot of potential in the market."

Reusing rubbish, sustainably

100% of the raw material utilised in the manufacture of 90% of Berdal's products – its buckets and tubs – is recycled household rubbish.

"This market is guilty of a lot of 'green-washing' when it comes to discussions about sustainability," Mr van den Broek complained. "But we're actually doing something about it, which we think is extremely important. We really believe in sustainability; it's the future of our business."

Berdal is a member of the Plastic Pact, a European Union initiative that aims to reduce the use of plastics by 25% by 2025. The company takes its membership very seriously.



In 2019, Berdal initiated a program to build new moulds that would allow it to manufacture its products with equally strong materials but using 10% less material. The company also invested in a new packaging production line that has reduced the use of packaging plastics by up to 30%.

Meanwhile, Berdal is committed to bringing what it calls 'endless lifecycle products' to the market. "This means that the end product must be the new material for a new product, creating an endless circle of recycling," Mr van den Broek explained. "Berdal was the first to introduce roofing products which were Cradle-to-Cradle certified in this category and now we're working on introducing buckets and tubs as well."

He added: "It's very important to show the European market that sustainability is not just something to talk about but that it's something to actually do something about; to deliver endless lifecycle products into the market."

Innovation and the future

In 2020, Berdal introduced a revolutionary new branding option for its buckets: In-mould labelling allows the company to create a photo-quality label on a bucket, directly within the production line.

Unlike traditionally screen printed labels, the in-mould label is extremely durable, can be any number of colours versus the limited options available when screen printing, and is produced more sustainably and efficiently. This technique is unique to Berdal and it has proved a massive hit with its customers.

"A lot of companies want their name or logo on the bucket, including in-store branding. It's also the same price as an unbranded bucket, so it's a lot of added value to the customer," Mr van den Broek revealed.

Looking forward, the company is optimistic despite the supply chain problems currently plaguing companies throughout Europe and elsewhere.

"Our combination of strong growth of 20% per year and the issues with raw material availability worldwide, are major challenges. But we're optimistic and so is the market. It's an interesting phase," he concluded.

