

Vecom returns to the table

At the end of last year, an opportunity presented itself, which enabled Vecom to re-enter the shipping business. One of the main areas that the company has re-engaged with is cleaning agents in the form of chemicals.

This opportunity came in the form of a co-operation agreement with Greek ship supply concern Unimarine. Unimarine had expanded to about as far as it could without incurring huge debts and was in need of a cash injection.

Vecom decided to enter into what it called a strategic alliance with the Greek concern, thus Vecom Marine re-emerged. A key element in this project was the fact that a clause in the Drew sale contract, which forbade Vecom from re-entering the shipping business for 10 years, had expired.

Basically, the marriage came about as Vecom had the financial clout while Unimarine had the contacts in the marine business. Vecom also had a large agency and representative network, which Unimarine could plug into.

During the third quarter of this year, the marine division's name will be officially changed to Vecom Marine Alliance and several of the products will be rebranded.

The range of products currently being marketed under the new regime is very similar to those on offer before the sale of the business. That is the delivery of chemicals and equipment for cleaning and maintenance, gas and cooling, welding and cutting and fire fighting, plus the supply of gas bottles. These can be offered as a complete package,

Since selling the marine division to Drew Ashland about 11 years ago, Vecom has concentrated its efforts on the land-based industrial sector. However, the situation has come full circle.

or piecemeal.

Since the sell-off 11 years ago, regulations had changed, there were new products and more would be developed down the line, Vecom said.



Vecom's Rein Breeman

Vecom Marine is now supplying the following products and services:-

- Cleaning and maintenance chemicals.
- Gases and refrigerants.
- Electrodes and welding equipment.
- Fire fighting and safety equipment.

Unimarine manufactures the chemicals and equipment on site in Greece, while Vecom's

headquarters at Maassluis, near Rotterdam, manufactures equipment and chemicals of 25 litres and over, leaving smaller packages to its Greek partner.

Vecom managing director Rein Breeman described the operation as a 'mid-size'. He told *TankerOperator* that there was nobody positioned in the middle, behind Unitor and Nalfleet and there was a market for another player. He explained that there were several other smaller players in local chemicals supply markets, many of which were spin-offs from Vecom. He thought they were not big enough to offer an alternative service to the alliance and that they fell down on quality issues, despite offering a very cheap price.

He also said he was looking to further strengthen the agency network and would welcome other partners who wished to join the strategic alliance. Vecom also has a manufacturing plant in the US and is looking to set up in China, either by buying a local company or starting from scratch. Breeman explained that the main markets served from Maassluis are Holland, Germany, the UK, Belgium (Antwerp) and Greece.

Breeman also promised not to make the same mistakes as in the past and said that the alliance wouldn't grow too fast as; "...you cannot pre-finance chemicals for a year." He said the staff was increasing again, but everything

would be done "step by step". However, the long term goal was to build up a network of worldwide partners. An example of staff increases was marketing manager Bart Jongenotter, who had only been with the company for six weeks at the time of *TankerOperator's* visit to Maassluis earlier this year.

To keep overheads to a minimum, in the future the sales and distribution functions would be co-ordinated for the members of the alliance. Breeman also said that the added value function, such as after sales, was another very important aspect for the future of the alliance as the technical knowhow on board was reducing with the result that an owner had to rely on more and more networks.



Unimarine's Jason Georgiou

Breeman has taken on the role of director of both companies - Vecom Marine and the Vecom Group. Unimarine founder Jason Georgiou continues as co-director of Vecom Marine. TO