



INTERVIEW WITH JOSEP FONT, SODECA'S MANAGING DIRECTOR

“To be competitive, industrial ventilation systems require considerable investment in R&D”

Sodeca specialises in the design and manufacture of fans and extractors for industrial applications

The company, which now employs about 300 people and has its headquarters in Sant Quirze de Besora (Barcelona), is an international leader in industrial ventilation solutions and extractors for smoke extraction in the event of fire.

Its high levels of investment in product development and innovation and adherence to the demanding legislation in these matters are some of the keys to its success.

How important is R&D to SODECA? Since, nowadays, all companies take it for granted that we must offer high quality products at the right price if we are to remain in the market and not be pushed out by the competition, the only choice we have, if we are to remain competitive, is to invest heavily in R&D. This implies that we must develop new products, new techniques and new tools, so that our customers can open up new markets or improve their adherence to the continuous stream of new standards and regulations. Sodeca therefore has a team of highly qualified engineers working constantly on research and development of new products. We also offer a full advanced industrial engineering service that meets all our customers' needs. Our large - 450 m² - aerodynamic testing laboratory is the nerve centre of the company.

You have recently begun studying new trends in ventilation which will help to preserve the environment, haven't you?

Indeed, this is a time of major changes in the world of ventilation. Companies have become aware of the need for energy savings and also, the regulations, in our case strengthened by Europe, require us to design products that meet certain energy efficiency standards. In turn, our customers must buy products that are in line with the legislation and we are therefore evolving along new lines with new technologies. This not only brings the customer financial benefits but also benefits society as a whole. The latest advance we have presented in this field, which exceeds the requirements of European regulations, is the creation of fans with EC motors,



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which use a new technology based on permanent magnets. These motors consume far less electricity and their efficiency is therefore much higher. This is a type of technology that was formerly used for small household appliances, which we have developed for use in industrial fans.

How have regulations on ventilation and smoke control in the event of fire changed, and how has SODECA responded to these changes?

Legislation on both these aspects has evolved considerably in the last two years. Firstly, in the field of ventilation, there have been changes due to the growing commitment to the environment I mentioned before, and these have obliged us to develop new technologies and reduce consumption. Secondly, in the field of smoke evacuation, there have been changes, not only in Spain but in the rest of Europe and worldwide, with laws aimed at improving personal safety and preventing occupational hazards. In this respect, public authorities are working hard to improve health and safety at work, and as a result are applying many regulations in the field of smoke extraction in

the event of fire. This benefits us considerably because, since 1995, we have been pioneers in the development of precisely this type of product and we have therefore grown in step with the regulations, manufacturing products that are fully in line with these requirements.

Does your presence at three important trade fairs that celebrate new trends in ventilation imply a firm commitment to internationalising the company?

Our commitment to internationalisation is not new, since we began this course of action four years ago, when we saw that the Spanish market was going through a bad patch. This orientation towards overseas markets means that, over the course of the year we must be present in many countries to promote our brand, and this year there are three very important trade fairs for the sector - Madrid, Frankfurt and Moscow. But we don't just go to this type of important event; we also go to other less well-known corners of the globe in Africa and Asia, whether directly or through our distributors.

Feria Climatización 2015, the air conditioning and ventilation trade fair, is held this year at the same time as Genera, the International Energy and Environment Trade Fair, and even in the same place. What do you think that this coincidence will result in?

Genera is a trade fair that has grown considerably in recent years, working in the fields of Energy and the Environment and given that the regulations, and - as a result - the market is requiring air conditioning and

ventilation companies to pursue that direction, so this coincidence is undoubtedly an excellent opportunity for leveraging synergies.

Could you describe some of your most significant international projects?

For years now, Sodeca has been a leader in providing ventilation and smoke extraction systems for many flagship building projects throughout the world. To mention just a few, there's the ventilation systems for the Tawteer Petroleum refinery in Bahrain and for the Luxury residential complex, the Deluxia Suites and Palace, in Istanbul. A more recent project is the smoke extraction system for two immense warehouses - over 300,000 square metres - owned by Amazon, one in Slovakia and the other in Poland.

How have you managed the company's growth in recent years?

The reduction in the Spanish market has led us to emphasise overseas markets and change our original business philosophy. We have realised that, to be competitive internationally, where there is a lot of competition from countries less developed than Spain, such as China, India and Turkey, we had to reorganise how we work. We have therefore created an industrial group called Sodeca Group, where we have begun a process of vertical integration, manufacturing the product ourselves and implementing the whole process, from purchasing raw material to the final product. When we started up we had a philosophy that was well suited to providing a fast service, but was not as competitive in cost terms. In this new phase we have acquired two manufacturing companies that process the raw materials, Sisteven in Madrid and Pideca in Torelló (Barcelona province). The fact that we are manufacturers has meant that we need a larger sales force and we

Software for selecting ventilation systems, to be used by technical departments and engineering companies

Sodeca's R&D department has developed the QuickFan Selector software, to make it easy to choose the most suitable fan for each facility. This practical new tool is principally designed for engineering companies, and will allow them to prepare projects quickly and easily, while complying with European regulations. QuickFan Selector is very user friendly, provides quick navigation and covers a wide range of products, but above all, it halves the time required to create a full technical report for a client.



Another advance Sodeca is presenting in 2015 that is intended for engineering companies is the option of downloading over 2,000 models of fan designed in CAD 3D, in over 30 different formats. This concept arose from the need to overcome the complications caused by each country working with different file formats, which makes it difficult for engineers to insert the dimensions of fans into their plans. This advance saves design time and thus speeds up the preparation of projects.



have had to set up subsidiaries and strategic countries, such as Chile and Portugal, in order to be closer to the customers, and we intend to extend this sales network to other countries.

What are your plans for 2015?

Since we are not only leaders in energy efficiency, but are also at the cutting edge in the field of smoke extraction, we plan to open up markets in places where these types of systems are rare, such as African countries, where we believe there is great potential for introducing our products.