

MRC Global: The trusted stainless

MRC Global, the industry-leading PVF distributor, has turned its attention to the stainless and high alloy market.

In recent years, the influential giant has been adding technical and specialized expertise to its world-class distribution operations. MRC Global recognizes the industry's need for the high alloy, specialty grade materials and continues to add to its capabilities to meet that specific need. The result of its efforts is a compelling offering to the downstream and chemical market, which is historically reliant on specialty PVF materials.

By Candace Allison

“Over the course of our history, more than 120 separate legacy companies have joined together to form the great company we are today,” MRC Global President & CEO, Andrew R. Lane, said. “By uniting our strengths, we have become something very special. Yes, we are the largest in our space, but we are also the best PVF distributor in the world, and that includes stainless and high alloy products.”

Stainless and alloy products are notoriously difficult to source and distribute effectively due to the many different materials, grades, and specifications involved. MRC Global Senior VP – BD, Robert Stein, and MRC Global Senior VP – Supply Chain Management, Valve and Technical Product Sales, John Bowhay, say their team is more than up for the challenge.

“While many people know us as the general PVF distribution leader, they don't realize the vast amount of specialized expertise we have on our team,” Mr. Stein said. “We have intentionally added stainless and high alloy experts to our ranks over the years because we are committed to supporting our customers in this segment. That is really what we are all about—serving our customers.”

Stainless & alloy expertise

In the U.S. and Canada, MRC Global has been providing high alloy and stainless products to customers for decades. In 2011, we acquired Stainless Pipe & Fitting in Australia to expand our capabilities in Australia and Southeast Asia. Then, in 2013, MRC Global acquired Flangefitt Stainless Limited in the UK and, in 2014, Stream AS in Norway, which further enhanced the MRC Global portfolio with offshore and capital projects expertise.

MRC Global is also the authority on NORSOK standards and specifications. While the strenuous standard was originally developed for the offshore market in the Norwegian Continental Shelf, it is becoming the “gold standard” for products being used in these applications around the world by many end-users.

The company has two representatives who sit on the NORSOK M-650 commit-

tee, the group that literally wrote the book defining this qualification standard.

“MRC Global has people that are widely recognized as pre-eminent in the stainless steel and alloys market,” Mr. Bowhay said. We have experts in different geographical regions who form a global network of experience and knowledge that is unrivalled in our industry. We also have a deep and comprehensive global inventory, which enables MRC Global to offer a compelling value proposition to our customer base.”

Currently, the company offers stain-

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less and alloy valves from 1/4” through 24” 600# in a wide variety of combinations. MRC Global also stocks instrumentation tubing, pipe, fittings, and flanges from 1/4” through 24” in varying alloys including 300-series stainless, duplex, super duplex, 6% moly, titanium, and nickel alloys.

Unmatched service footprint

In North America, MRC Global has more than 150 service locations, including its world-class valve distribution center and 10 regional distribution centers (RDC). While the sheer number of locations is impressive on its own, what really makes the MRC Global network stand out in a crowd is its hub and spoke distribution model.

“Our hub and spoke model makes us who we are,” Mr. Stein, who grew up in the industry serving downstream customers in the US Gulf Coast in the 1980s and 90s, said. “We are the global leader with



all the size and benefits that is part of that distinction, but our extremely efficient distribution model is what makes us agile. Like a huge linebacker who can still turn on a dime, we are built for both strength and speed.”

Local branches tailor their inventory to fit the needs of their specific customer base, then regular replenishments or special orders are delivered from the hub locations, also referred to as regional distribution centers (RDC). Often, shipments are sent out from the hub to its spokes on a daily basis.

“We have spent decades perfecting hub and spoke, and no one else in our industry can run it as efficiently and quickly as we can,” Mr. Stein said. “It allows us to provide a level of service that other companies just can't match. And for our customers, especially in the middle of a turnaround or plant outage, time is money. We have built a network that creates value by responding to our customers' needs quickly while maintaining our high levels of quality, safety, and reliability.”

Trusted quality assurance program

Quality assurance is always important but when specialty materials are called for, it is paramount that the product is what it says it is. This assurance is especially vital to the safety of the facility, the people who work in it and the community it serves. The MRC Global Quality Program is a proactive approach to this process.

“With our quality process, we focus on identifying manufacturers who can be trusted to produce a consistently high quality product that matches our customers' specification,” Mr. Bowhay said. “Then, we invest in the relationship with regular site visits, audits, and long-term problem solving.”

The resulting MRC Global Approved Manufacturer List (AML) is so well re-



spected that many of the company's customers have adopted it as their own for all of their sourcing considerations.

“We are constantly developing additional sources for the products our customers need but we have a very high standard for inclusion on our AML,” Mr. Bowhay continued. “It is extremely important that our AML process is rigorous, robust, and reliable, so that MRC Global can consistently supply world class products to our customers.”

The company credits their proactive quality process, versus relying solely on after-the-fact product inspections, as the reason they are able to consistently provide high quality options to their customers in a timely manner.

Proven project execution

An added benefit to working with supply chain experts like MRC Global is the ability



and alloy distribution specialist



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to lean on the company’s day-to-day expertise and apply it to special projects.

Several years ago, when a long-time customer came to MRC Global and asked for options regarding several large, capital projects they expected in the upcoming three to five years, the MRC Global team went into action.

“Project work is different,” Mr. Stein said. “Projects are planned years in advance and they often have a certain window of opportunity to actually perform the work. Purchasing and material man-

agement has to be done differently so that the material is available when that relatively short window opens.”

For this customer’s projects, the team established a dedicated project hub to stage the products. Materials were purchased, inspected, properly documented, stored and, finally, when the fast and furious construction season began, staged for delivery. This procurement and distribution model allowed MRC Global to purchase products as efficiently as possible without delaying the project timeline be-

cause they could be stored at the project hub until needed. Then, after completion, MRC Global’s experts coordinate the disposal of surplus material and maximize the return on these excess materials that would otherwise be lost.

“There is a different rhythm in a project warehouse,” Mr. Stein said. “Products aren’t always coming in and leaving in a consistent timeframe, so we had to invent an innovative warehousing solution that allowed us to be more dynamic. Additionally, close alignment with the key project stakeholders and a tight communication model delivers success.”

Security of a long-term commitment

Kim Shelton-Brown, MRC Global’s Senior Director of Stainless & Alloy Products, recently received a typical RFQ (request for quotation) for pipe with very specific chemistry. Kim, a 30-year steel and specialty material veteran, thought the request looked odd. She called the customer and, together, they discussed which application that the product would be used for and in what conditions.

Based on that conversation, the customer realized that they did not need the specialized product for the job, and at Kim’s suggestion, they identified a less expensive product that would safely perform the task and was available immediately.

“In the end, we were able to save the customer time and money,” Ms. Shelton-Brown said. “I know I could have sold them what they originally asked for without asking questions but that’s not what we do here. MRC Global acts as the expert

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advisor for these types of specialized materials, and in that role, I knew I could help them find the best solution for their need. It’s just what we do here, take care of our customers for the long-term.”

Since joining MRC Global in 2016, Ms. Shelton-Brown has enjoyed being able to present customers with the opportunity to bolster their supply chain with the full strength of the global leader in PVF distribution.

“We know this product and we know this business,” Ms. Shelton-Brown said. “When you add that knowledge base to our reputation for integrity and dependability in the marketplace, it’s exciting to think about the complete package we can offer our customers, especially in the downstream sector.”

If you have questions about how MRC Global can help you with your stainless and alloy needs, please visit www.mrcglobal.com.



► MRC Global at a glance

Company name:	MRC Global
Founded in:	1921
Global Headquarters:	1301 McKinney Street, Suite 2300, Houston, Texas 77010
Products:	PVF: Valves (from ¼” through 24” 600#), instrumentation tubing, pipe, fittings, flanges (from ¼” through 24”)
Alloys:	300-series stainless, duplex, super duplex, 6% moly, titanium and nickel alloys
Website:	www.mrcglobal.com