



Company background

Milton-Keynes-based manufacturer Mechline, which specialises in innovative food service equipment products, has changed significantly since it was founded in 1984. Today, it has 48 employees, a 30,000 sq ft plant and turnover of just under £10m a year. Mature and well-established in the UK, it is now looking to build its base of customers overseas: exports currently account for around 5% of sales. Throughout the growth and development of the company, one thing, however, has remained constant: its commitment to quality and to providing the best products possible. "Our main customers are commercial kitchens, and their priorities are our priorities," says Kristian Roberts, Marketing Manager. "Everything we do, we do with hygiene, safety, the environment and efficiency in mind. Our products are engineered to address operational issues such as safety, efficiency and the need to reduce environmental impact, and we always make sure we adapt to changes in regulation and the law."

The company's emphasis on safety, reliability and quality led it to apply for BSI Kitemark certification in 1998, and its Dormont gas connectors have been Kitemarked ever since. "BSI fits in well with our ethos," Mr Roberts adds. "There's a real synergy between what we stand for and they stand for."

The BSI Kitemark

Kitemarks, exclusive to BSI, are not given for 'life': BSI can withdraw the licence to use one if standards are not maintained. This means regular, six to 12-monthly, site visits by BSI — and an ongoing monitoring system that helps BSI's customers, and their customers, reduce risks.

"The Kitemark provides invaluable, ongoing quality assurance for us," Mr Roberts explains. "It helps ensure standards never slip. Our equipment is constantly calibrated to make sure all manufacturing processes are kept to the BSI Kitemark standard."

Mechline is now celebrating 20 years of carrying the Kitemark and, to mark the achievement, is donating 10p for every gas hose sold to the British Heart Foundation, tying the Kitemark to the heart symbol in a promotional campaign.

"We pride ourselves on the care, time and 'love' we take in manufacturing and assembly. The heart symbol and the Kitemark symbol both fit in well with that. So does the British Heart Foundation, the charity we're choosing to support this year," Mr Roberts explains.

Support for charity is part of Mechline's emphasis on 'people and culture'. The company doesn't just make donations, though: it gets involved with the local community. It works with MK Snap, which helps people with learning difficulties gain the skills they need to find jobs, and sends its gas hoses to the charity to be cleaned, labelled and packed.

"We don't really think of it as CSR, it's just something we like to do, and enjoy doing," says Mr Roberts.

Competitive advantage

Support for charity and involvement in community work has 'spin-offs' in terms of employee commitment and engagement. The same could be said for the Kitemark. "The award of the Kitemark can be linked to job satisfaction," Mr Roberts adds. "It says something about what you are as a brand."

The advantages of the Kitemark are not, however, confined to 'softer' things such as motivation and communication. They are core to the business. "Dormont by Mechline is the only range of gas connectors that's Kitemarked," says Mr Roberts. "This gives us a significant competitive advantage. Other makers in the UK market just have the British standard, BS 669, which is required under law, but we can show we go the extra mile with the BSI Kitemark."

ISO 9001

Mechline's experience with BSI made the company the obvious choice as certification

body when, several years ago, it decided to move to the international standard for Quality Management Systems, ISO 9001. "We wanted to formalise our procedures and processes for quality control, and BSI were the first people we thought of."

Mechline was not disappointed. "For a small-to-medium-sized business like us, adopting ISO 9001 was a big exercise, and it seemed daunting at first, but BSI guided us through it. Their vast experience means they understand how businesses work. They were open and honest with us about what needed to be achieved, but they realised that it wouldn't happen overnight."

The future

The company has recently been re-certified by BSI to the latest version of ISO 9001, scoring 100% when the BSI auditors returned. ISO 9001: 2015 places more emphasis on leadership and on commitment to quality management throughout an organization. "9001 is about 'embedding' the OMS — from manufacturing processes to quality assurance in admin practices, and the new version takes that a step further," Mr Roberts explains.

Mechline has no doubt it will continue to use BSI for ISO 9001 in the future — and continue to Kitemark its products. Mr Roberts says: "The Kitemark symbol sends a powerful message to our customers and it helps us manage risks. It means we can be sure of maintaining standards over time. We've used BSI for the past 20 years, and I've no doubt we'll use them for the next 20."

Contact us to find out how BSI certification can help your business make excellence a habit.