

Cyprus: island of innovators



Firms from Cyprus are supplying a host of high quality building products that meet the requirements of modern buildings. Kevin Stanley visited some of the leading manufacturers targeting UK specifiers with their offerings.

Cyprus is perhaps best known, in terms of exports, for foodstuffs such as citrus and potatoes. However the island of just over one million inhabitants now wants to become a player in the international building products market, with a host of relevant products developed to closely meet specifier demands.

Like many companies, Pavlos Zenonos & Sons' – manufacturers of metal scaffolding formworks and prefabricated houses (www.pz-scaffolding.com) can trace its progress back through the generations. Current managing director, Andreas Zenonos' grandfather formed the company in 1974, with a small workshop of just 150 m², leading to a 1000 m² factory for the local market. However when Cyprus entered the EU in 2004 and the market suddenly became much bigger, the company had to make a decision. "We asked ourselves should we invest or should we close down? We knew that the

bigger companies would rule the market, so we invested to take the company beyond Cyprus," explains Zenonos. From humble



Product manufacturers have responded to similar challenges and legislation as those in the UK (Pictured: Olympia Sports Center in Limassol, which features structural products from Tsircon).

Main image: Bank of Cyprus head office

beginnings the company has progressed to become the leading manufacturer and supplier of scaffolding and steel formworks in Cyprus. Today Pavlos Zenonos & Sons is ready to export its products to the UK and the rest of the world. With all products that it offers being made under strict EC regulations and specifications, customers can be assured of quality. Zenonos says that the firm supplies "thousands of contractors," in Cyprus and abroad. The main export territories for the firm are Russia, Gibraltar, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, and the whole of the Gulf.

Andreas Zenonos believes that the prefabricated solutions his company provides for workers on building sites are easily transferrable and appropriate for the UK market. "We deal with any project of any size and limitations. Our solutions can be translated to the UK market. Our prefabricated products are used on construction sites for

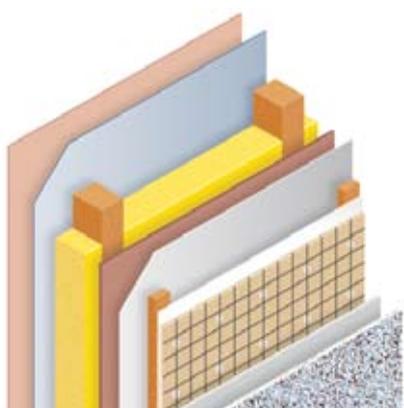
engineers, architects, etc, and also as offices, storage and canteens.” He asserts that they are “cost-efficient and affordable.”

He adds: “We can offer the UK market 35 plus years of experience, and well-certified product quality.” The prefabricated approach offers quantifiable savings on traditional solutions, says Zenonos. “Compared to traditional methods, we save approximately 70 per cent of labour time. The quality of product is consistent and far higher than other traditional work.” He adds: “We minimise the loss of material due to usage.” The proof is in the pudding in terms of feedback from his satisfied customers: “We have received numerous letters of thanks from companies and public bodies.”

Quality, Innovation and Sustainability

The attention to quality in Cyprus product manufacture is no different from that in the UK. Companies employ ISO 9001: 2009 and CE marking, staff are knowledgeable and well educated. Zenonos: “All our products have CE marking. Manufacturers and exporters in some other countries don’t care about CE marking. They make a sample that is up to the quality required for CE marking but then make subsequent products not up to the same standard. Achieving certification perhaps only costs 2 per cent of the overall price, so it’s not worth not getting it.”

His firm is used to solving challenging problems within projects. On a government project to provide offices in Nicosia, Zenonos faced an “extremely difficult” challenge, because of the “single side walls”. He explains that the problem was solved using “a lot of knowledge, experience and system efficiency.” The firm employed three-dimensional designs incorporating load calculations to ensure the needs were met. Another project with similar issues was a business centre in Nicosia, with the added complication of columns of



Duro Light produces and distributes polystyrene products for thermal and acoustic insulation



Case Study: Preston North End Football Stadium

Aluminium cladding firm Muskita, through subsidiary Universal Components, supplied the Preston North End football stadium. The project was to provide the aluminium structure and the MU800 curtain wall was specified by the architect because of its pleasing aesthetic values and colour, to complement the glass. “The materials for the project were supplied by Universal Components and fitted by one of our customers, Stewart Fersina,” says Peter Cawley, general manager of Universal

Components. “In terms of the glazing structures, we supplied materials over a six week period and we would be pleased to supply materials for other football stadiums in the UK and other similar projects,” Cawley adds.

He explains the supply procedure used: “We have regular shipments of a 20 tonne container coming over from Cyprus with Muskita products. The curtain wall for the stadium was extruded in Cyprus and exported by container to the UK. It was then fabricated in our factory in Bristol and shipped out to the customer.”

“We were producing thermally-broken aluminium frames 20 years before Part L” – Demos Mouskis

varying heights. Andreas Zenonos says that the firm again used 3D designs plus loadings. On the Yermasogia Dam in Limassol, 21 m-high columns meant that the firm needed to produce a high-performance formwork.

Sustainability is an important part of Cypriot business, confirms Tomas Mousoulides, director of Thomopol – a producer and supplier of polystyrene products for thermal and acoustic insulation (www.thomopol.com.cy). His firm is leading the way in the Cypriot construction industry, having set up symbiotic relationships with other companies, to recycle the waste from production.

Further enhancing sustainability and environmental credentials, Thomopol products can easily be used in conjunction with underfloor heating. In the UK market, consumers are making greater use of this environmentally advantageous method of

heating their homes. “Fibrostir FL is used on the underlay of the floor and then the electrical heating is attached onto the insulation board restricting heat flow upwards. In Cyprus this product is mainly used for big residential blocks, airports, offices and generally all building requiring good heating and low energy. Thomopol products enable heating systems to work efficiently and effectively,” says Mousoulides.

The firm currently mainly exports to Italy, via Greece. Mousoulides says that while Italy already has lot of manufacturers in the field, “demand is growing and local production is not satisfying demand”.

Thomopol products can achieve an energy saving of 50–70 per cent. They range from 10 mm–120 mm in thickness and densities from 28–40 kg/m³, for different applications. Fibrostir RF is used under roof tiles or

The Titan Building in Clydebank, clad in aluminium by Muskita



Innovations in Aluminium

"If you're talking aluminium, you're talking to Muskita," are the confident words of Demos Mouskis, executive chairman of Muskita Aluminium Industries (www.muskita.com.cy).

Already offering high-performance options directly to the UK market via its subsidiary, Universal, Muskita is one of the top ranking building products suppliers in Cyprus. In business for 50 years, the company has put major investment into state-of-the-art technology in order to provide cutting-edge innovation.

"It's difficult to convince people outside Cyprus that we can provide high tech solutions, but we were producing thermally broken aluminium frames 20 years before the Part L Building Regulations suggested it. We had to find a way to cope with the problem of the low U-values achieved by

aluminium windows and to redesign our systems to make them thermally efficient," says Mouskis.

A specific driver behind innovation has been the 25 per cent loss of value for sterling over the last 14 months, which has made exporting far more difficult.

"In response to the difficulties we have experienced due to the drop in the value of sterling, we've moved into higher value products to add value with more exotic finishes," says Mouskis.

"Customer demand for aluminium is on the rise despite the recession; there are more uses for it. It's a versatile material. PVC once outsold aluminium because it was thermally superior although aluminium has many advantages over PVC. It's non-toxic, non-corrosive and recyclable. Now we can offer thermal breaks, we have a chance to re-establish ourselves, especially

in the UK's residential sector." He adds: "It offers durability, functionality, security and safety and there is huge potential for aluminium to replace PVC in the UK market," says Mouskis. The firm currently also exports to Ireland, The Netherlands and Germany.

Demos Mouskis says that Cypriot and British values are not dissimilar: "We are close to the British in terms of fundamental business practices. Face to face relationships are a strong part of our company values," he says. "We began, just like many Cypriot companies, as a family business and like to keep as much as that ethos as possible, even though we are now a large company," says Demos Mouskis.

"We are open to new ways to expand and it's important for us to expand in the UK. For us, the sky's is the limit," concludes Mouskis emphatically.

sandwiched between the two levels of screed for preventing heat loss whilst Fibrostir WL is used in external cavity walls. Fibrostir BT is used on the columns of buildings and, combined with the Fibrostir WL in the external cavity walls, it prevents heat loss from the joints. Fibrostir WRS is used for the external insulation system. "Fibrostir is also used for existing buildings that have problems with heat and energy loss. Using an external WRS thermal insulating system can save up to 75 per cent of energy," says Mousoulides.

Export Strategies for Success

Tsircon (www.tsircon.com) is a leading manufacturer of specialist building materials. Its original main areas of expertise were waterproofing, concrete repairs and industrial flooring. Having turned to manufacturing, it established new premises in the 1990s,

and from 1997 has undergone the stringent ISO 9001:2000 certification process, for its production, sales and distribution.

The company's 'wet' products include concrete and mortar admixtures, concrete repair, waterproofing membranes and coatings, curing compounds, floor treatments, decorative and protective coatings, grouts and anchoring, and surface retarders. 'Dry' products supplied include expansion and construction joints, expanded metals, thermal and acoustic insulation, mechanical fixing systems, formwork and accessories, roof accessories, drainage and geotextiles.

Managing director Angelos Tsirides says: "In terms of exports we are currently supplying to the Middle East and Africa; if we get the opportunity to supply to the UK, we will." He adds: "there is a lot of competition in Western Europe in the field of building chemicals."



Above: Pavlos Zenonos & Sons manufactures metal scaffolding formwork
Below: Nicolaides & Kountouris Metals Co. produces roofing profiles to required length



“Heritage and tradition are matched by innovation and cutting-edge technology”

Tsirides says that his products have an essential function both in normal circumstances, and in earthquake zones. “Our products are a necessity for many product specifiers, used to increase the quality and strength of concrete as well as to make it waterproof. They increase structural integrity to restore and strengthen concrete against earthquakes.” The firm currently exports to Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Nigeria.

Stavros Kountouris, managing director of Nicolaides & Kountouris Metals Company (www.nkmetal.com.cy), which designs and manufactures steel framed buildings, is not optimistic about economic prospects, but says his firm has staying power. Established in 1977 as a fabricator and erector of industrial steel buildings and structures, the company diversified into the field of designing steel buildings and into the production of cold formed steel sections, roof claddings and insulation. Thirty-two years later, due to continuous investment into the latest technologies and the constant improvement of its personnel and services.

The firm currently exports to Lebanon and Malta, but is hoping to extend exports to the UK. However despite its impressive progression and expansion, there are always problems to overcome and exporting in particular raises its own problems. Greek and Italian manufacturers have very low prices as well as the Chinese. However it’s clear that Nicolaides & Kountouris is not going to be put off and is determined to succeed. Once the recession is over it will be easier for us to export to the UK,” says Kountouris.

Of course companies do not progress by standing still, and heritage and tradition are matched by the innovation and cutting-edge technology that can also be found within Cypriot companies. Leontios Kasapis, manager of manufacturer and supplier of bricks and tiles firm Gigas, explains his firm’s approach. “We are a small family company so we are working with external consultants from Greece and Italy to gain more experience.” In terms of product specification, Kasapis pinpoints the battle between traditional brick build and timber frame which is ongoing in Europe as highlighting sustainability concerns. “Countries such as Norway and Sweden are trying to say that it’s better to use timber to build the houses, but France, Spain, Italy,

Belgium and ourselves say it’s best to use clay, for reasons of sustainability,” says Kasapis (email: gigas_cy@spidernet.com.cy). The firm has several markets, exporting to the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, Hungary, and New Zealand. It is looking at the possibilities of exporting to Qatar, Libya, Kuwait and Israel.

Despite the recession, a number of Cypriot companies are investing heavily in building new factories. For example, Gigas Enterprises is currently building a brick factory, and has recently completed a new facility making insulation products. With industry leaders such as this, producing a wide range of offers for today’s specifier market, building products from Cyprus look to have a bright future.



Tsircon main highway project

Innovations in Insulation

In such a hot country as Cyprus there has understandably been some apathy towards insulation. However in recent years positive growth has been seen by Cypriot insulation companies. “Traditionally insulation products have not been used in Cyprus. Only after Cyprus entered the European Union in 2004 and were obliged to abide by EU Building Regulations have builders begun to use it,” says Petros Mouskis, managing director of Duro Light – a producer and distributor of construction, and thermal insulating, materials such as plasters, screeds and expanded polystyrene beads for the production of lightweight concrete (image below shows screed being installed, for more info visit www.durocyprus.com).

“Not all builders understand the need for saving energy – in summer you keep the heat out and in the winter you keep the heat in. We’re trying to change builders’ perceptions of insulation in a positive way.”

“Our product is a new method of insulation. Previously people used EPS board. EPS board is good for attaining



low lambda values but causes problems in construction and doesn’t allow humidity to escape. Our product keeps the heat in, but also lets the moisture out. It has a low lambda value of 0.058,” explains Petros Mouskis. “There are only a few suppliers of this product across the globe, we bought the patent, and manufacture the product here. Our thermal Insulation products, already used by the largest construction companies in the country, provide thermal and acoustic insulation, claimed to be safer and more environmentally friendly than foam cement, and to have the lowest conductivity coefficient in their field. They also have class A fire performance – able to withstand direct fire for two hours without igniting and will also cool, directly after exposure, very quickly,” says Petros Mouskis.

The firm is looking to export to the UK, Switzerland, Finland, Germany and Austria.

