

Interview

Neil Bradbury, Managing Director
Schweizer Electronic

Sam Sherwood-Hale, Editor of Rail Professional spoke to **Neil Bradbury**, Managing Director Schweizer Electronic about the company's new direction for the 2020s, his technical background and experience in the military



You joined Schweizer Electronic as Managing Director just over a year ago, how have you found the experience so far?

I have to say that the Schweizer Electronic Group have made the transition into senior management a great experience. The group structure has allowed me the autonomy to bring together the experience gained from several senior sales roles across many years. This, along with a very clear remit for growing the business and improving relations mean that I can honestly say that the first twelve months have flown by.

On reflection, the freedom given to me by the CEO and board, has allowed me to improve my leadership and management as well as handing me decision making that I craved in previous roles.

Schweizer Electronic is a business that is a real joy to work for. A family owned and run business that has unique products that are developed with end user feedback built into the design and build processes. Uptake of the Schweizer Electronic products has grown and as such the profile is growing.

What does your role entail?

When I first took on the leadership of the UK business, it was clear that having only two employees (including myself) didn't allow for rapid growth and expansion. Working in sales and development roles in different rail segments has given me a good understanding of where we can grow as a business. To that end, at the tail end of what was a difficult 2020, I took the decision to build my 2021 budget presentation to the board with a clear indication of my intent to grow the business and I embarked on a recruitment drive to bring in the right people to not only consolidate and maintain the Schweizer Electronic business in the

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UK but to allow us to grow and develop our customer offering.

Taking on Nathan Moore as our Technical and Training Manager has now given the UK business the knowledge and expertise to deliver product training on our own products and also to look at areas of potential such as designing work sites for our own Minimel Lynx Track Safety Systems and providing a consultancy element which gives Nathan a chance to grow within our business and in the wider industry.

With the addition of Alex Bennett to the team as our Office Manager, her business knowledge and experience of business system, means that we can now streamline our internal processes and look at introducing new systems to align with the global group and bring a level of unity which has been missing.

Developing relationships within the industry and working with Network Rail to gain a larger segment of the available market and promoting the Schweizer Electronic brand are, as always, at the forefront of day-to-day activity and now having a strong team with me, I can focus on the business growth and positive exposure more.

Your background is very technical, including a period early on as Lead Electrician during a six-month operational tour with a front-line infantry unit in Kosovo. How has that background informed your work now?

When I first joined the army, it was first mentioned to me that there were fast track opportunities to move through the ranks to eventually becoming an officer. Although appealing at first, I declined these opportunities to focus on understanding what happens in a busy working environment and observing each 'boss' that I had the privilege of working under and learning from their very different management styles and approaches.

The British military gave me a very solid grounding and work ethic which I have always tried to bring to each position I have held. It's a mental strength to adapt to change and always focus on the end result and aim to complete the task.

Every day is a learning day and I'm still picking up very useful tips in management which I incorporate into my leadership approach where possible.

You moved into a managerial position later on but also continued working in an 'on the ground' operational support capacity. How do you marry these two responsibilities together and which do you prefer?

Not easily I can tell you, but I felt it was needed. An internal mental transfer that allowed me to maintain an element of control in how I managed my teams but also how I managed up through the leadership. My leadership approach is one where I like to understand what's going on, allowing me to make a truly informed decision where needed. If this means getting my hands dirty, then so be it. As to which I prefer, I have to say that the increase in responsibility has moved me away from the hands on more and more and it feels good.

The Schweizer Electronic business was recently brought under a single roof, how was this achieved? What was the catalyst for this move?

When I joined the business in 2020, we had three locations covering admin, archive and warehousing and in different regions. Virtual office in Manchester for admin, archive in Warrington and warehousing in the Midlands which meant covering a lot of miles to carry out simple tasks administratively.

Added to this was a lack of customer facing facilities. Brownhills served well as a warehouse, but we couldn't run demonstrations there or invite clients in (pre Covid-19) to look at our equipment and solutions. There was also nowhere to provide training, which was an aspiration we had when I took over.

We looked at several facilities which would allow us to move all three areas of the business under one roof and give us that client facing space we needed. but the new location in Tamworth suited best.

Closing the archive and moving the virtual office were the simple tasks, it was the moving of our warehousing and operations from Brownhills to Tamworth that would take the hard work. Steve Henderson, Warehousing and Logistics Manager, handled all aspects of the move across and was only delayed when he contracted Covid-19. His hard work shows in the new facility as he now has the space available to lay out a warehouse that has a workflow, room for stock items and space for the track safety equipment rentals business.

We also have a facility to deliver training on our track warning systems and level crossings, which we will begin to deliver once restrictions have been lifted sufficiently to do so. So, the catalyst was the need to have somewhere to grow, which we now have and it's safe to say, we all enjoy working there.

Schweizer Electronics' core business is high security remote control and radio data transmission systems – what are the different benefits of Automated Track Warning Systems (ATWS) versus Lookout Operated Warning Systems (LOWS)?

With recent events fresh in our minds, it's obvious that removing risk wherever we can be paramount, and the National Safety Task Force (NSTF) have hit the ground running in their adoption and restructuring of the rules around track access and safety.

Having attended several online events where this topic has been discussed, it's reassuring to hear the consistent message of

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Nick Millington and his team in their drive for improved safety of the workforce. As the ever-increasing demand for faster, safer trains on improved and safer infrastructure there will be increased demands on the workforce to maintain that infrastructure to allow for the increased speeds.

As for the equipment, I suppose the simplest way to explain it is that ATWS removes the need for assisted lookouts in remote locations. Replacing the remote human elements with track mounted sensors means we have permanent locations set up ready for work.

Of course, there will be a requirement for a COSS, but with implementation of more automated systems, the job of the COSS is more focussed in the immediate area and not split with consideration of remote positioned lookouts.

Planning these work sites then becomes less onerous for the planners in that lookouts don't need to be briefed and transported to access points. There are clear, mapped safe working zones that give warnings that can be set for line speed, maintenance and inspection activities and maximise time available on track.

With approval for our Minimel Lynx products in SATWS and ATWS formats recently issued, we are now working with the NSTF to deliver our automated (ATWS) and semi-automated (SATWS) into Network Rail routes. Planning and delivery sooner rather than later are key, and we are working with our Swiss HQ to ensure we deliver not only products but also safe systems with accredited and competent training and support.

What does Schweizer Electronic have planned for the year?

2021 brings new staff, new activities and new orders. NR have recently approved our Lynx product line for ATWS and SATWS use, and we have plans in place to deliver in the areas of design, 2nd line tech support and accredited training to better support NR in their goal to deliver a safer working environment for the track teams on the ground.

Not only that, but we are also close to opening our facility for demonstrations of our equipment lines. As well as the Lynx safety products we also have our VaMoS and Flex MSL crossings which also provide safety on track.

So, 2021 and beyond is looking extremely bright for Schweizer Electronic UK and the wider Schweizer electronic Group and we hope that once restrictions have been lifted that you'll pay us a visit in Tamworth to look at what we can offer.