

GYS, a leading French welding equipment manufacturer, is barely known in the UK, despite producing 250,000 welding sets and battery chargers a year. This is now set to change with the opening of a UK subsidiary.

# French revolution crosses channel

**ONE of the strengths of GYS is its focus on product and process innovation** – a strength that has been underpinned by its strategy of manufacturing as much as possible in-house.

Bruno Bouygues, who runs GYS with his father Nicolas Bouygues, explains: 'Key production techniques are all integrated under one roof to minimise handling time and to produce faster and cheaper. Price has become more and more critical. If you want to keep your production facility in Europe you don't have any option other than to consolidate your supply chain where you can.'

'A further benefit is that because GYS does everything within the company the barriers to innovation, in products or processes, are very low. We are constantly looking to see what we can change in our production methods that will make the product more robust or give us additional features for a more aggressive price. Our technology, quality and price give us a very strong value proposition. We are maybe slightly more expensive than the Chinese – but not that far away – and we offer a whole lot more,' he says.

'When we acquired GYS twelve years ago, the company employed slightly over 40 people in an old-fashioned factory and had made no significant commitment to R&D for years. Today the company employs about 400 people in four countries and we manufactured over a quarter of a million machines in 2008.'

But, as a family business, GYS has never had a short-term approach – what mattered was the excitement of growing the company. 'Finding new ways to do things, developing products and providing people with challenges, being innovative in our products, manufacturing



processes and marketing – these are the things that really matter to us,' says Bruno Bouygues.

When Nicolas Bouygues took over the business twelve years he took a methodical approach to rebuilding the fundamentals of the company. At first, GYS focused on developing a new range of electrode welding machines, then moved on to battery chargers and automotive body shop equipment. Now that GYS is a strong contender in each of these areas it has turned the full focus of its R&D on becoming a full-range Tier 1 supplier of industrial welding equipment within the next three years.

Many product improvements are a direct result of feedback from distributors around the world. With thirty people in R&D, eight in production engineering and four in quality management, GYS can quickly mobilise a team to put its ideas into action. 'If we want to change a small detail in a product we can pretty much do it the next day.'

Without our customers, we couldn't have evolved from where we were 12 years ago to where we are today,' says Bruno Bouygues.

Along with product innovation, GYS has devoted a lot of development effort to its production processes – a job made easier by the company's philosophy of integrating its production under one roof and making as much in-house as possible. This gives the company total control over its quality and additional flexibility within its industrial processes.

GYS reinvests its profits within the company, giving it a strong financial position in the current economic climate. This ensures long-term stability of supply for customers and allows it to continue to invest in production technology. Recent investments include four Mazak CNC machining centres, multi-axis lathes, Trumpf punch presses and press brakes, robotised electronic assembly systems, an electrostatic powder coating line and automatic transformer winding systems.

With 1,000 machines going out of the factory every day, there is no room for rejects or production problems, so an extremely rigorous testing regime is built in at every stage of manufacture. And walking along the production lines at GYS, it is clear that every detail of production is meticulously documented with detailed assembly and procedure drawings.

Says Bruno Bouygues: 'Quality is critical to us as we believe it is the basis for long lasting relationships. Remember, we are a family firm and we are in it for the long run.' In Europe, GYS enjoyed a 13% increase in sales in 2008 and its financial strength will be the basis for further expansion in the UK – possibly even an acquisition if it provided a good platform for faster growth. [www.gys-welding.com](http://www.gys-welding.com)

