



Michael Murphy, Founder, RIVAL

Grow: RIVAL

Making It Happen: LEO Monaghan helps railway engineering company stay on track, despite Brexit

With UK customers accounting for 50% of sales, Brexit represents a significant challenge for railway engineering specialist RIVAL. The Carrickmacross, County Monaghan-based company's response has seen it diversify its markets, and continue to innovate and develop new products to meet customer needs.

Established by Michael Murphy in 2004, RIVAL is a dedicated engineering, supplies and project management company working in the rail industry. "I left Ireland with my wife Una in the mid-1980s during the recession," Michael recalls. "We went to the UK, where I worked as a production engineer with a multinational railway engineering company, which is now owned by Siemens. I got a great education and very good experience there, as well as the benefit of exposure to a multinational organisation. We came back to Ireland in 2003 and saw the opportunity to support the railway business here."

RIVAL supplies a range of railway signalling, permanent way, traction and rolling stock products. But that is to oversimplify it.

"Our products include anything that attaches to the track, along the track and into the control centre," Michael explains. "We manufacture and design products and solutions, including switch mechanisms, electrical connections, track circuits for train detection, signals, display installations, cable management systems, ducting, signal points, gantries, and equipment cabinets and housing for safety critical equipment."

These are not products that are available off the shelf from suppliers. "We have an extensive range of products and services that covers all aspects of the rail sector," says Michael. "In addition, we have the ability to reservice and recalibrate the majority of instruments and equipment used within the industry."

Our factory and team also have the ability to evaluate, design and manage small and large projects on behalf of clients.”

RIVAL has grown over the years and now counts Irish Rail, Translink in Northern Ireland, and Network Rail in Britain as its main customers. The company is also targeting growth in mainland Europe and sells to customers as far afield as Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, India and China through its website.

Customer service has been fundamental to that success. “We position ourselves as the first port of call if a railway engineer has an issue,” Michael points out. “They come to us to see if we can solve it. The solution might be a new product design or a service that improves existing processes. If it’s railway related, we’re interested, regardless of how large or small the project might be.”

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That openness to new challenges is another hallmark of the company, as John McEntegart, Head of Enterprise with Local Enterprise Office Monaghan points out. “When they get enquiries for a product they don’t have, they see that as an opportunity and create the product. The company is built on innovation.”

With 50% of its business coming from UK clients, Brexit is naturally a concern for RIVAL. “Brexit will have a big effect,” Michael notes. “Quite a lot of our materials are supplied by partners in the UK as well. It will have a major impact and we have been doing a lot of planning for it with the support of Local Enterprise Office Monaghan. They have helped us with a Business Expansion Grant to grow and we have received support under TAME to go to a European rail event in Strasbourg last year and to go to Rail Live in Stratford Upon Avon this year. Rail Live is the UK’s largest rail fair, with 6,000 people from the industry both in the UK and internationally attending. Those events have been part of our response to Brexit.”

Innovation and continued product development are also part of the response. “Our Local Enterprise Office mentor has been a great support and has kept us up to date in relation to various supports, including training for both myself and our staff. For example, we were supported in achieving the ISO 9001 and ISO 45001 standards, and we wouldn’t have done that without the backing of the Local Enterprise Office. We have also been using its Brexit supports.”

The ultimate goal is to have RIVAL products sold to railways worldwide. “We are looking at products for the world market, but each design has to be approved for each national market. Deutsche Bahn, Network Rail, SNCF and so on have their own product approval process. We are currently going through a rail approval process in the UK. It’s not a complicated product, but we have been two and a half years at it and expect to spend another six months at it before we get approval. That process can be 10 or 15 years for a safety critical product.”

The company has also received support under the Co-Innovate Programme for the recruitment of a design engineer to work on a new product for the UK market. “The UK will remain our biggest market focus for the next 18 to 24 months despite Brexit,” Michael adds. “Ours is a difficult market to enter, but if you have the right product and are able to add value for customers you will succeed.”

“The railway game is changing all the time,” says John McEntegart. “And RIVAL is constantly upping the ante by moving up the value chain and meeting those challenges. The company came through the recession successfully and is still moving forward. They are operating in highly specialised niche markets and succeeding through constant innovation and an ability to see new opportunities and take advantage of them.”

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