



Talking Tech

Nigel Elmes, UK Tech Centre Manager at Biesse, talks about the changing role of the Tech Centre in Daventry and how it's facilitating far reaching developments for Biesse customers.

Walk into any car dealership and you'll find pristine examples of the latest models lined up and dusted down, all waiting for eager customers to view. You may see the odd bonnet lifted to attract the gaze of a passing prospect, or an interior being checked out for comfort, and for sure you'll see numerous sales personnel waiting to pounce at the first buying signal. That's probably what most people would expect of a showroom. The reason Biesse UK doesn't refer to its Tech Centre as a showroom is because, far from just being a sterile environment where wood and panel processing specialists like you can view an ever-changing collection of technologies, the Tech Centre in Daventry is a fully functioning production environment where

you can not only view, but also try out machines, solve production issues and even experiment with new ways of manufacturing. And everyone working in it is a seasoned professional with a production background and a mission to show you how to get the best out of Biesse technology.

Nigel Elmes is Biesse UK's Tech Centre Manager. He's a very approachable chap, very knowledgeable, straight talking and no stranger to blue sky thinking. It's his job to run the facility, make sure all the machines are fully serviced, demonstrate machines – and come up with solutions to production problems. He has a long track record of helping customers find ways of working more efficiently. "The Tech Centre in Daventry has been around for over 25

Above right: Edgebanders included the Akron 1100 and Jade 240 to industrial models equipped with AirForce.

Right: The Akron 1100 J

years," Nigel told Furniture Journal. "I joined in 2013 from a production background. The team I work with includes three other people – Andrew Walters, Simon Draycott and Sammy Carr. Andrew is our edgebander and sander specialist. Simon has a production background. He's our software specialist but he's very hands on with the machines. Sammy is responsible for our software training and supports me on CNC demonstrations.

"Managing the Tech Centre and helping to run the in-house shows takes up a lot of my time, but I still get to do about half the demonstrations. For in-house events, we work closely with the commercial team to help get the message across. It might be a sanding show, a cutting show, or a general Open House event. We make sure the

machines are all programmed and we have the materials available for what we are making – and keep the place tidy," he says, adding, "It's a challenging job." With around 14 fully functioning machines that have to be available for use at a moment's notice, I can quite believe that, especially given that Nigel and his team are tasked with keeping them operational for upwards of 80% of the year, whilst also managing machine rotations and Tech Centre maintenance which can take up the remaining 20%.

The availability of different machines in the Tech Centre changes regularly. When I visited, there was a full complement of two sanders – a Viet Opera 5 and an entry level Viet S1 – five edgebanders from the Akron 1100 and Jade 240 to industrial models equipped with AirForce, a Selco WN2 beam

saw, a five-axis Rover A machining centre, a Rover K, a Materia CL five-axis CNC for machining advanced materials, a Biesse Skipper V31, a Brema EKO 2.1 and various other solutions ranging from a drilling and inserting machine to Biesse's neat vertical panel storage system. The machines Biesse keeps in the Tech Centre tend to be geared more towards off-the-shelf solutions, but many of the machines I saw were equipped with the latest technological developments from Ligna.

"The machine range that we have is constantly evolving and improving," says Nigel. "Whenever we get a new function or a new feature, we quite often put it in the Tech Centre. For example, our AirForce system was first shown here in the UK. Anything that's new to the market will be



Nigel Elmes



One side of the Tech Centre is dedicated to machining centres.



A Selco WN2 beam saw sits next to a Biesse Materia CL.



The Viet Opera 5 and the Viet S1.



The Skipper V31.



The Brema EKO 2.1.



Tapping material on a standard CNC machine is now a native function on bSolid that's available on Biesse machines.

shown first at Biesse in Italy, or at Ligna, but because we manage and rotate the machines in here, we normally get the latest technology with each rotation. The idea is that, if you want to pop in and see us, we can perform a standard demonstration on any of those machines, but if you want to see something particular, we may need a few days to get materials or work out exactly what you want to see."

One of the key roles of the Tech Centre is proving solutions to customers. "There is no text book to production any more," says

Nigel. "Everybody does it in a different way. What we have here is a how-to place that helps to show customers what they want to do using the technology we have available. A customer might be looking for a machine and they want to make something in a particular way. It's not just about the machine, or about showcasing the latest technologies, it's about how they are going to make that on our machine. It's a great meeting ground to have conversations with customers, but we're using it as a research and development centre as well.

"Sometimes, we help to solve production problems by testing ways of cutting things out or ways of edging. A particular example we have been working on recently is how to tap material on a standard CNC machine. It's fairly unusual. We've been doing this in acrylic and compact laminate. Although it's been known that you can do this with a woodworking machine, we've been able to prove it. The function is now native on our bSolid 3D cad cam software program and available on our machines. That's just one example.

"Another example is where we helped Luke Thompson with the IF fixing that he designed. We helped develop the initial macro. He came in with an idea for a furniture fixing. He'd made it and he wanted to understand how to get his machine to work with it. We came up with a method of making it work on his machine, then we suggested some improvements to make it more machine friendly. He then modified the design in line with our suggestions. We spent a lot of time with him developing the macros so it worked effortlessly on a CNC." Since

its launch at a Biesse Open House event hosted at the Tech Centre in 2018, the IF fixing – known as the Peanut – has become a worldwide success story.

As part of the Tech Centre, Biesse UK also has a dedicated software training facility that includes a training suite and presentation area. "Each new CNC machine sold includes 2 seats on a software training course and customers can also book additional seats for training our own technicians," says Nigel. It's a simple matter to transfer what's been

demonstrated during a software presentation to the production floor and see it working on the machines in the Tech Centre. The two are only separated by a glass door.

If you are interested in visiting the UK Tech Centre for a demo, please call Nigel on 01327 300366. Nigel and his team of production-minded technicians would love to see you to discuss your requirements or if you are reading the App edition of Furniture Journal with your smartphone or tablet, tap [here](#) to see a video of an in-house event at the Tech Centre.