

Aikawa gathers forces to give papermakers a choice in stock preparation solutions

New organization under a single brand is driven by customer requests for alternatives to avoid being “boxed in” for key technologies

For many years, Aikawa Iron Works worked quietly to build its foundation as a premier supplier of stock preparation technologies in Japan. Its acquisitions of specialist companies such as AFT Screen Plates of Canada, Finebar of the USA, and POM Technology of Finland were conducted with little fanfare.

“Perhaps we have operated under-the-radar,” admits Masaki Aikawa, Chairman of the Aikawa Group. “But that has been our style. We put performance ahead of self-promotion.”

In pursuit of higher performance and recognition, the Aikawa Group is announcing a name change and a new, consolidated global organization. “This is in response to our customers’ requests,” Aikawa admits. “They want alternatives to the packaged offerings of the ‘Big Box’ major suppliers. They prefer the freedom to select the best single equipment, with the expertise to put systems together when required.”

The new organization is being consolidated outside of Japan under the umbrella of Aikawa Fiber Technologies (AFT), which is guided by Michael Stephens, President and a 35-year veteran of the pulp and paper industry.

Stephens says that AFT is being structured into teams to serve the three major customer groups for Aikawa outside Japan: screen manufacturers (original equipment manufacturers) who contract with AFT for manufacturing of screen cylinders, plates, and rotors; mills who order these engineered wear parts directly from the company; and mills looking for technical solutions for fiber processing, stock preparation, and machine approach applications.

“Each of these customer groups has unique needs that often times are addressed separately,” Stephens says. “But there are also occasions where customers need solutions that cross over from capital equipment to engineered wear parts to process/systems knowledge. When this happens, we don’t want to confuse our customers with separate interfaces or separate companies with different ways of working.”

According to Stephens, in the contract manufacturing segment, AFT produces more screen cylinders than any manufacturer in the world. Stephens explains, “Most of the OEMs are customers of ours and we give them preferred pricing based on volume. The focus here is on high-precision, low-cost manufacturing that is private-labeled for OEMs.”

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The fiber processing and stock preparation solutions are a combination of Aikawa technologies and the technologies of the former POM Technology Oy of Finland, which Aikawa acquired. POM has a patented compact wet end technology for paper machines. Timo Koivisto, formerly the head of POM Technology, is responsible for AFT's Process/Equipment Solutions team.

The transition from separate companies to a unified AFT organization is currently underway and will be completed by year's end, according to Stephens. Key management decisions will be announced in the near future.

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About Aikawa Fiber Technologies (AFT)

Aikawa Fiber Technologies (AFT) can trace its roots to the Union Screen Plate Company 100+ years ago. No other supplier has as much screening applications experience in the pulp and paper industry. Today, AFT is a global supplier with manufacturing centers in Canada, China, Finland, Japan, and South Korea. The products include process/equipment for stock preparation, engineered wear parts for screens and refiners, and private-label manufacturing services for many of the industry's best-recognized OEMs.

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