

Unique Welding: the customer-centric welding service provider

Following its acquisition by Air Products of Weldamax – the integrated welding distribution holding company for Unique Welding – *African Fusion* talks to new CEO, Gaetano Perillo, about his company vision for an expanded, integrated, flexible, customer-centric and value adding welding solutions provider.

In May this year, Sanlam Private Equity (SPE) completed the sale of Weldamax Pty Ltd – one of the largest independent Welding Distributors in South Africa – to Air Products, who chose Gaetano Perillo from the finance division of Air Products to take the partnership forward.

“Weldamax is our corporate name, but across South Africa we trade with the welding market through our Unique Welding branches, through the Thermamax brand to our direct custom-

ers, while we also have a brand called Max-weld and Braze, which trades exclusively with Resellers and Distributors,” Perillo tells *African Fusion*.

“Air Products started supplying gas cylinders to Unique Welding about 15 years ago, after successfully winning the contract from a previous supplier. Today, Unique



Welding is Air Products’ biggest cylinder customer. From our 14 branches across South Africa, we circulate several thousand gas cylinders every week to customers all over South Africa: oxygen and acetylene for gas cutting, and the many different packaged gas mixtures, such as the Coogar and MagMix welding gases, for the gas shielded welding processes,” he continues.

Purchasing the Unique Welding business therefore made a lot of sense as it offers Air Products and Unique Welding customers a holistic and integrated welding and cutting solution from a single supplier.

“While we have always had a good relationship, Unique Welding now has seamless direct access to the gas expertise from Air Products’ specialists such as Sean Young and Gary Lombard, while Air Products has direct access to our welding machine and consumable specialists, along with our comprehensive range of welding and cutting hard goods and services. Together, we are a completely integrated welding and cutting service provider,” Gaetano Perillo points out.

“We have carefully selected and accumulated many product categories over the years, for welding machines, MMA electrodes, welding consumables and PPE, most of which are under our exclusive Thermamax brand. But we also offer some other brands, such as the Trafimet MIG, TIG and Plasma Torch brand from Italy,” he continues.

Other brands include Tier 1 Wilson gas cutting equipment, which comes with a very high specification and is sold in South Africa co-branded with Thermamax. “We tend to retain the name on Tier 1 brands, so customers are assured of their quality and origin,” he adds.

“We strive to consolidate our suppliers, which enables us to better control the quality and price of our range. We also favour working directly with the manufacturers,

which makes communication easier and reduces delivery timelines. It’s not always easy, but the bigger we grow, the more leverage we have,” he explains, adding that exclusivity in the South African market is also an essential aspect of this strategy.

Over and above its business ethos, Perillo says that Unique Welding builds relationships with the manufacturers of the equipment and consumables in its range. “We work really closely with the people in these companies to customise our product range and to make sure that we have the best mix possible. So the Thermamax brand has grown in leaps and bounds over the past five or so years. It is now recognised as a cost-effective, excellent quality brand,” he says.

Every machine that comes in is already tested by the manufacturer against 11 different quality control tests: passing metallic dust through the fan; dropping it from two metres; bounce-vibrating it for 48 hours; submerging it in water; and much more. The machines all arrive in South Africa calibrated with certificates. “And, before we launch a new product, our own people are trained to use it properly, while our after-sales service technicians are sent overseas for training overseas in how to service the equipment,” he assures.

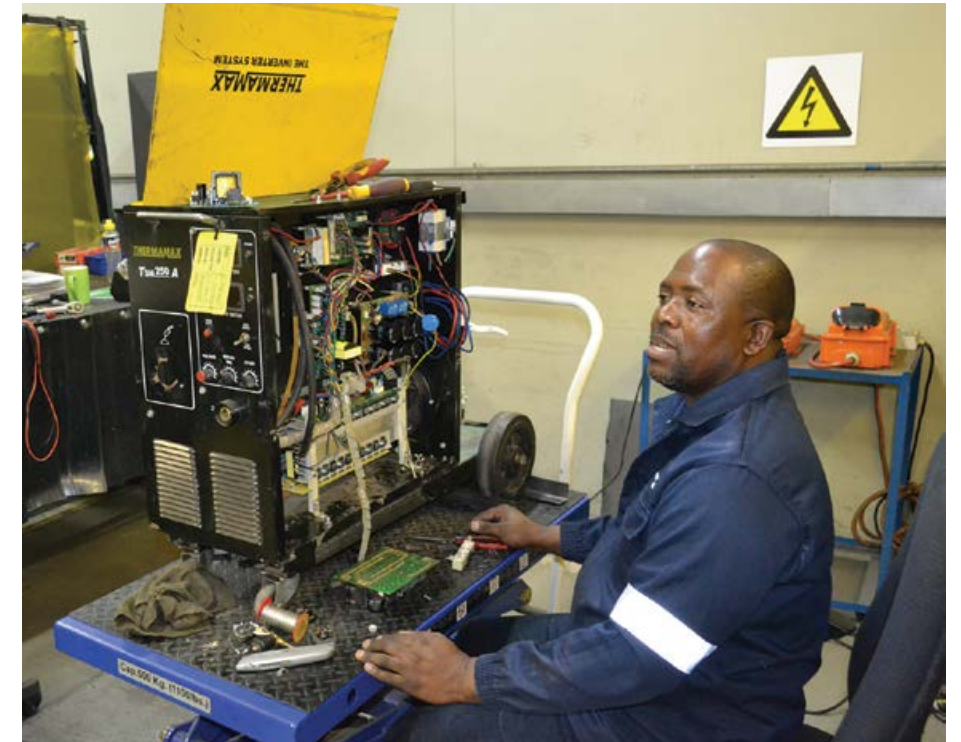
Describing some of the latest additions to the Thermamax range, he cites the new submerged arc welding system, the Apollo SAW 1250, along with the UltraMIG 350A and 500A synergic MIG welding machines, which are a range of very heavy-duty industrial MIG/MAG welding machines with separate wire feeders.

Also very important, is after-sales service. “We have a main service centre for our equipment at our head office in Boksburg and at some of our other branches in the main centres around South Africa and at partner supplier sites in neighbouring countries. At these partner supplier sites, trained and qualified technicians are available to support clients and to repair our welding machines and those from many other OEM brands,” Perillo points out.

“I believe in continuity. I am not about to change everything, but I know the importance of reviewing procedures and striving for continual improvement: aligning procedures and systems for maximum efficiency and cost effectiveness, for example.

“Unique Welding has a strong, flexible, agile, customer-centric focus and a solutions-driven sales culture. All I need to take care of is the organisational efficiency and the margins,” he concludes.

uniquewelding.co.za



Zakhele Sobesho, one of Unique Welding’s trained service technicians working at the company’s Van Dyk Road head office in Boksburg



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Unique Welding, Air Products’ biggest cylinder customer, circulates several thousand gas cylinders every week to customers across South Africa.



The Apollo UltraMIG 500A synergic MIG welding machine, which is part of Unique Welding’s latest range of very heavy-duty industrial MIG/MAG welding machines with separate wire feeders.