

Fronius Agency in SA targets Africa-wide penetration

African Fusion talks to Robert Drumm, Fronius export sales manager for sub-Saharan Africa, about the new Fronius Agency in Midrand, South Africa, set up as an entry point for expansion across Africa, and the new financial and access models being considered to ease market penetration for the premium brand.

According to Robert Drumm, the Fronius Agency in Midrand represents a new business approach for the company. “Agencies are different from subsidiaries, in that their core purpose is to support our local representatives and to seek growth opportunities. We now operate Fronius subsidiaries in 28 countries worldwide, but the Agencies are still new and constantly evolving concepts. So far, South Africa is one of only three countries in the world to have a Fronius agency, the others being Vietnam and Argentina,” Drumm begins.

The starting point of the initiative is to be able to offer better support for Fronius distributors and representatives in South Africa: Bolt and Engineering (BED) and Port Elizabeth-based Pro-Arc Engineering, which was appointed at the end of 2019 as a conduit into the automotive sector.

“Fronius machines have a long history in Europe, USA and China, which is now our 2nd biggest market for robotics and automated welding. Our systems are designed to be able to hook up with robots

from any OEM and, over the years, we have had longstanding relationships with MOTOMAN/Yaskawa and ABB, both here in South Africa and across the world,” he tells *African Fusion*, adding that TPSi systems are now being installed in Yaskawa and ABB demonstration rooms in South Africa.

Highlighting the core purpose of Fronius agencies, he says that the idea is to make skilled Fronius employees available to support local markets. “We believe a direct presence in the local market will tighten and strengthen our relationships with our Fronius distributor network. It also gives us onsite access, which helps us to get a better understanding of situational needs and difficulties so that we can recommend or develop appropriate and cost effective solutions,” Drumm suggests.

In addition, he sees the Fronius Midrand Agency as the entry point into sub-Saharan Africa. “We have already identified partner network opportunities in Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe. Nigeria is particularly exciting. We are establishing a much better distribution network there and, through



Jevant Spencer, a 10-bay welder training school has been set up with Fronius equipment,” he tells *African Fusion*.

Fronius’ South African Agency is housed in a two storey building in Midrand. “We currently have three permanent employees, two for Perfect Welding and one for Solar Energy. We have set up a demonstration centre, with a robotic welding cell and a turn table, along with several welding booths for multi-process manual welding.

“We have access to the full spectrum of Fronius products, starting with small portable systems for MMAW and GTAW, and going all the way to the big automated systems used by the automotive and heavy fabrication sectors,” says Drumm, adding that this centre is available to local distributors for customer demonstrations and for training of their representatives and end users. “Our local representatives can use this demonstration facility as an extended arm in terms of practical training and manpower,” he says.

On the upper floor of the Agency, as well as the offices, there is a seminar/training room that can accommodate up to 20 people attending presentations or theoretical training. “We can cover all aspects of Fronius welding equipment, including the underpinning welding theory and the practical welding implications. We are also able to set up training and demonstrations to represent clients’ on-site needs to prove the equipment capability on their workpieces,” Drumm assures.

“Our first course has now taken place with employees from different BED branches. The course involved our new TPSi welding platform, which embraces many different welding processes, most notably, GMAW, MCAW and FCAW, but the platform also accommodates MMAW and GTAW, as

well as many process variants,” he says.

Originally built around Fronius’ TPS synergic pulse GMAW welding system, Drumm notes that the new Fronius TPSi has gone well beyond the idea of synergic pulsed-MIG/MAG welding.

“Our TPSi solution is a software-driven modular welding platform that enables one power source to be used to access a multitude of welding processes and variants. Depending on customer demands and changing requirements, we can upload different parameters and processes to achieve an arc perfectly suited to the application,” he says.

The TPSi platform is designed as a set of interconnecting modules that can accommodate a whole range of processes from a single power module with a software-upgradeable TPSi controller. As well as accommodating the various different welding processes and hundreds of synergic lines for different wire, base material and shielding gas combinations, the TPSi’s output current and voltage waveforms and other parameters can be precisely defined to suit different circumstance.

Drumm cites Pulse Multi Control (PMC) as an example: “Within the pulsed wire processes we have added PMC, which offers additional arc stabilisation features. Here, a penetration stabiliser or an arc length stabiliser are available to make it easier for a manual welder to achieve the desired result.

“The penetration stabiliser adds an additional wire control parameter so that penetration does not vary if the distance between the welding torch and the component changes. The arc becomes significantly more stable and the penetration is much more constant.

“The Arc length stabiliser, on the other hand, uses the welding voltage to maintain a short and well directed arc length, guaranteeing accurate transfer that is not susceptible to interference. In addition, low-spatter control (LSC) is used, which relies on the power source’s rapid response rate to minimise the current and duration of short circuits, quickly restoring arc length while minimising spatter.

“Our signature CMT (cold metal transfer) process is also now available as an add-on module on the TPSi platform, as is our whole range of waveform and arc control innovations,” Drumm informs *African Fusion*.

Another technology being featured at Fronius’ South African Agency is the new WeldCube Industry 4.0 solution being introduced to simplify and modernise



Above: Within the pulsed wire processes, Fronius has added PMC (pulse multi control), which offers a penetration stabiliser or an arc length stabiliser to make it easier for a manual welder to achieve the desired result.

Right: WeldConnect combined with WeldCube enables actual weld data to be captured, analysed and documented, even when welding manually.

the documentation, traceability, part identification and collection of welding data. “WeldCube is a Fronius-developed software solution for the management, communication and visualisation of welding data,” explains Drumm. All TPSi solutions, and most of our other digitally controlled machines, can be connected to an ethernet network. Pre-set parameters as well as live welding data can be uploaded to WeldCube for processing and further analysis,” he says.

“With WeldCube, welding co-ordinators and engineers can visualise ongoing welding operations from multiple welders and welding machines. They can identify defects and welding problems in real time, enabling much faster response times.

“WeldCube supports quality assurance (QA) and traceability initiatives: validating via real data that a welding procedure has been completed according to specifications. It can also be used for accurate costing, because welder time, wire and energy consumption data can be stored and made available for every weld performed by every welding machine being used,” notes Drumm.

Business models for Africa

The other key role of Fronius Agencies is to develop alternative business models better suited to the African market. “Selling a premium Fronius machine into economies with low incomes is always going to be difficult, so we are looking at rental, licencing and microfinancing possibilities to make the introduction of our world-class welding offering possible.



“We know we cannot sell into Africa in the conventional ‘Western’ way, but we are sure that the potential is big, which makes investing for the longer term worth our while. Oil and gas, mining, energy, agriculture and infrastructure opportunities are all opening up and we see a huge market for quality welding equipment in these fields.

“High-end equipment is designed to help welders succeed, while older low cost technologies make it harder and slower, even for welders with good skills. We hope to offer people all over Africa the opportunity to produce quality products using equipment designed to best suit the needs on the ground.

“We are setting up Solutions Hubs across sub-Saharan Africa to make Fronius equipment easier to access, while at the same time setting up accessible financing options to make the products affordable in the short term and cost-effective as a long-term investment.

“Africa is a very important market for us and we are determined to find ways of adapting our marketing and sales strategies to best suit the continent, by building a robust sales distribution network with easy access to Fronius welding technology and to financial models that will make our solutions easy to adopt,” Drumm concludes. ■



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