



Full *control*

Born out of an electrical company with the desire to sell a greater range of products, Marble Automation was founded in 1997 to design and deliver alarm monitoring and automation systems to the shipping industry. Located on the former island of Urk, the Netherlands, Marble Automation began as a specialist in automation systems for fishing vessels, but in recent years has grown into a world renowned partner in automation possibilities for all types of ships including inland, offshore, sea-going, safety standby, and wind farm supply vessels.

Championing its own product lines in alarm, monitoring and control systems, Marble Automation offers a number of key set-ups, including the Bridge Navigational Watch Alarm System (BNWAS), 10 channel alarm unit, emergency telegraph, and tachograph. In conjunction with the IMO's change in regulations making it compulsory for all passenger and cargo vessels to have a BNWAS fitted, Marble Automation has seen good growth in this area of its portfolio. Designed to protect against the unintentional falling asleep of crew members, the BNWAS regularly asks for action therefore ensuring vigilance and a reduction in accident risk.

Marble Automation's own MS BNWAS 421B system is certified to the latest IMO requirements, as well as the Lloyd's Register. Communication with the VDR is integrated, and the autopilot can also be connected to the BNWAS. The system can also be expanded further with remote reset buttons and PIRs.

Such systems are not however, the exclusive domain of Marble Automation with several other companies around the world offering a variety of different prices, quality and configuration possibilities. Against this market backdrop, Stefan Meun-Visser, sales manager of Marble Automation, elaborates on what keeps the company competitive: "We have some of the best priced products in our quality bracket. Of course, there are some cheaper products but they don't always have the relevant approvals or stand up to the expectations of the client. Our units are quite small so they are easy to integrate into existing vessels for refit purposes, or into new builds during the construction process.

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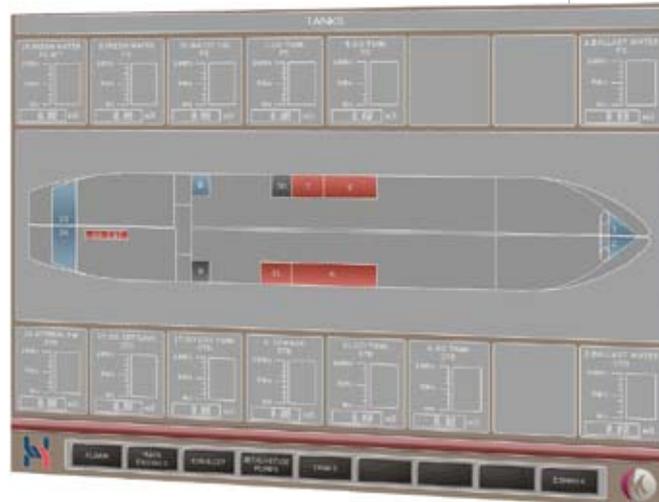


construct an alarm monitoring system using rival touch screens and programmable logic controllers (PLC) that can even integrate with the navigation, light controls, and hydraulics," he continues.

Aside from the PLCs and touch screens, Marble Automation carries out the complete engineering and development of its units, including the BNWAS, emergency telegraph and tachograph in-house. Due to regulations however it does not have the equipment to fabricate these at its own site, so this is outsourced, but the company does have responsibility for all necessary assembly, testing and packaging.

Flexible in configuration and applications programming, the MS 10b 10 channel alarm unit is a qualitative fault detector that can be applied for a number of situations. This includes alarms for generators, main engines, the wheelhouse, cabins, day care centres, and porter's lodge. "The unit can be connected to the bridge unit through a RS232 connection, enabling crew to monitor all alarms from one point," highlights Stefan. "We also recently gained Lloyd's certification for our MS325 emergency telegraph, which is mandatory on all vessels with an engine over a certain horsepower rating. The system is designed to give commands if the regular set-up fails, by transmitting commands from the bridge to the engine room. This enables the operation of all equipment to be unaffected. Each unit is the same, but is easily configurable to be either Master or Slave."

The final core product in Marble Automation's arsenal is the tachograph – a system that is required by legislation on certain inland vessels, such as those sailing on the Rhine, which wish to sail outside of the block times. The unit monitors how many hours the vessel is sailing using a sensor placed on up to three shafts for one



device. Although the market for inland vessels has declined at present, Marble Automation is one of only a few sales points on the Netherlands for this type of equipment.

In terms of the general market conditions though, Stefan remains positive despite the waves currently being felt by the shipping industry: "The market has been quite good for us, mainly because of the BNWAS, but also for the alarm monitoring systems. This is quite a small market in itself, and this fits in with our own capabilities as a smaller company. If there is a refit or adaptation to make to a vessel, it is easier for us to make a system than for the larger companies, and as such we also deliver some units to these competitors as we can make a system for a lower price than their own."

"Our normal product range is aimed at the marine market, but we are also looking into other sectors such as industry. We have already delivered some products to this sector and are looking to try and move into this as a second market. Although the market may be different, the same product range such as alarm monitoring systems, and the same hardware and programmes are still applicable making it easy for us to supply these types of clients," he adds.

As the business enters its 15th year in the market, it is clear that its ambition has not dimmed over this lifetime, with Marble Automation retaining the same mission for complete control as it did when it first began. Highlighting the company's next focus in achieving this, Stefan concludes: "We want to develop our alarm monitoring systems even further, and to move towards a more modular construction in order to sell standard units more easily. As well as more of these off-the-shelf set-ups, we want to grow our presence in the custom project market. Of course, ultimately we want to see more products like the emergency telegraph and BNWAS going into vessels. Around 90 per cent of our products already have Lloyds and other approvals, but within the next five years we want to extend this to our complete range." ♦

