

Simple customizations can make all the difference

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You know how sometimes you wish they made that product just a few centimetres longer, or at a slightly different angle so that it's just perfect? Well then SMC Pneumatics has come to the rescue of many smaller manufacturers who are not able to afford large R&D costs to have customizations done.

They call it *Simple Specials*. According to Product Manager, Ernst Smith these specials are there to assist customers in achieving their ideal situation. With over 12 000 basic component types it is hard to believe that one could need anything more but these are split further to accommodate different sizes, strokes and options. "All things considered we offer around 750 000 product variations, which brings me to the point of stressing the big focus that SMC has on training. Lucky for us, every person currently employed by SMC has enjoyed extensive training in the UK," says Smith. Smith has also undergone further intensive training in locations such as Japan, Spain and Germany.

The X Factor

"SMC has developed a software application where customers can configure parts to exact specification," adds Smith. "This is almost like a 'made to order' instruction which will set off the wheels on this side to get the local production of these special products going. We would generally refer to this as an X-factor option. Having been in every imaginable industry for so many years, we have realised that there is no way you can meet the specific requirements of every customer through stock standard catalogue products. Customers always has something which require specialised solutions for example a space constraint or an unusual distance or angle for example. SMC will manufacture these specialised products for the customer, give it a part number and the exact non- standard part can be precisely replicated at any time in future." elaborates Smith.

The price for such an item is readily available through the SMC app and quite affordable comparable with other made to order solutions. The X-factor customisations which normally involve special machining and assembly will be accommodated at the company's local Johannesburg facility. According to Smith, SMC has invested near R 15 million on machining and tooling for the new facility to be able to offer customers

the local customization and quicker turnaround time.

If a higher level of customization is required, SMC are ready to roll up the sleeves. The company has an engineering division which is able to assist customers with more intricate specializations. The company has also called on the expertise of an international production manager from the international SMC fold to assist with the initial management of the local production to ensure the necessary skills are transferred and the facility achieves its production goals.

Essentially his role will be to assist with the RFS (Request for Specials). The South African facility reports into the UK offices of SMC and they have further capabilities should the local office not be equipped to deal with a special for whatever reason. There is even the option of further escalation to the Japan head office facility. In the RFS cases, SMC will supply the customer with a ready built system which makes the installation quick and seamless.

“Ultimately we want happy customers who know that SMC is an innovative company with the ability to meet their requirements not matter how specific” concludes Smith. “The company is not about futuristic concepts but rather to continuously monitor the markets and listen to our customers to identify their real needs and meet those with real solutions.”