

# Both sides of the coin

**Robert Bird from major cash handling organisation Microsystem Controls speaks to Alex Lee about his business strategies, products and the future of the coin-op market**

**M**ICROSYSTEM Controls, or Microcoin, as it is commonly referred to, is part of the Astrosys International group of companies. Widely acknowledged as one of the leading coin validation technology experts worldwide, Microcoin was acquired by Hong Kong based Astrosys International in 1999, to complement its GBA banknote reader business. There are two key product lines which its group supports: Microcoin electronic multi-coin validator and the GBA (Global Bill Acceptor) banknote validator.

Its regional offices are as follows. Europe: Astrosystems. US: Astrosystems. Australia: Microsystem Controls. Hong Kong: Astrosystems (Far East).

Within the Microcoin operations in Australia, Bird's role is marketing and sales manager, which covers all aspects of sales and marketing for Microsystem Controls. In a more wide-ranging role, I also have group responsibilities as the Astrosys International group marketing manager, where I am responsible for marketing related issues such as brand management, website development, advertising, press releases and so on. He works closely with other senior colleagues in the group, including the group engineering manager and Microcoin general manager, Peter Smith and Rob Austen, general manager of its Astrosystems UK and US offices.

As a group, Microcoin's business strategy is to continue the emphasis on its core business of coin and note handling. It is also examining and developing various business opportunities which have been identified both within and associated with the core business.

It plans to continue developing its global sales and support network in order to cover the markets and territories that its products allow it to operate in. For example, its GBA HR1 note reader now supports over 150 different note currencies.

Bird told *InterGame*: "Our reason for moving into a territory is typically one of product demand and flowing from that, product support. We already cover many of the territories around the world and continually assess the global markets, as there is always room to focus more intently on the hot spots."

The gaming market in Russia is one such area where Bird's firm is looking to increase its sales efforts with its new GBA ST1 note reader, whereas Spain is an ideal candidate for its GBA HR1 stackerless note reader. South America, on the other hand, has gaming applications that cry out for the high performance of its Microcoin QL coin validator.

From a GBA note reader standpoint, its GBA ST1 is soon to be released to the market and this adds a true vending product to its GBA portfolio. It is a full plastic construction, offering an up or down stacking note validator with an optional locking cassette.

Bird added: "Our Microcoin products are currently being revised to become RoHS compliant and the latest Microcoin QL model will be ccTalk compatible." Both products will be on show at the ATEI on the Astrosystems stand 421. Microcoin recently expanded its engineering resources in the UK and Australia



*The GBA ST1*

to accelerate its plans to introduce a number of innovative products into the market in the short to medium term. In terms of show presence, starting with ATEI/ICE, the company will visit all the major shows that cater for its markets of interest throughout the world.

Bird treats his competitors with respect. "We do not view any of our cash handling competitors as a greater or lesser rival. We sell our products based upon the benefits that we offer our customers and these vary depending upon the market we are selling into."

The Astrosys International group of companies focuses upon delivering cost effective, reliable and high quality products to their customers. It prides itself upon strong after sales customer service and technical support.

Bird revealed: "In the cash handling business, you need to be incredibly reactive to a problem, since frauds and slugs cannot be foreseen, yet customers will demand immediate solutions to a situation which may arise. Both Microcoin and GBA products are backed up by technical teams who are able to instantly address and resolve this type of issue. For example, some years ago, Microcoin in Australia resolved a coin fraud overnight which took a competitor some considerable time to address."

From a product perspective, Microcoin is renowned for its product design and technical excellence. Its attention to detail resulted in the Microcoin QL



**Robert Bird, Microsystem Controls**

coin validator being awarded three Australian Design Awards when it was released.

Similarly, the latest evolution of the current GBA note reader platform, the GBA HR1, is a result of 'small detail enhancements,' which, through ever increasing sales volumes, is proving that Astrosys International's product performance, and reliability, is second to none.

Coin-op markets are under constant threat from other forms of cash accepting devices, such as banknote readers and cashless devices including credit cards, smart cards and online payment systems. However, the type of market and geography will determine how much of a threat these devices represent.

In US gaming, coin-op has been dealt a severe blow with the advent of TITO, where banknote



**The Microcoin QL**

readers coupled with ticket printers are replacing coin operations very quickly. Vending, on the other hand, is holding up in countries such as Australia and UK, where their higher denomination coins are sufficient for snack and drink vending and work well with change-giving needs in vending machines. Kiddie rides are another example of a coin-op market which is quite stable by virtue of the style of operation and typical vend amount.

"However, it is fair to say that coin-op globally will require to adapt to the needs of their individual markets as technology brings solutions to the table which offer viable alternatives to coin operation," added Bird.

When asked if he could change one law relating to the coin-op industry, Bird replied: "Very selfishly, I would ban the use of note readers in gaming in order to return the cash-handling focus back to coin-op!"

Bird then took a moment to reflect on his firm's history: "Back in 1986, there was no threat from note readers or cashless technology. Coin-op business was a very viable and thriving business across a wide range of markets. Thanks to advancements in technology, we first saw the banknote reader emerge as a competitor to coin-op and more recently, cashless solutions as competitors to both coin and note applications.

Moreover, over the years, competition has increased from within the industry, with many more coin and note products being available from all around the world, all competing for the same piece of the pie."

With the rapid emergence of card payment systems, *InterGame* asked Bird if he feared the worst for coin and note acceptors. He replied: "We believe that there will be a place for coin and note acceptors into the foreseeable future. They offer immediate credit-free and fee-free payments. Cashless technology just provides people with more options to pay for their transactions."

**With thanks to Robert Bird and all at Microsystem Controls.**

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