

PIERRE MAROL Alstef Group President

Introduction to Pierre



I became managing director of Alstef Automation in 2000, following the transfer by Alstom to an English fund.

In 2006, I bought the company with the management team and the employees, but I have been in the company for over 30 years. I joined CGP, then a subsidiary of Alstom in 1991 and then took over the management of the Orleans site in 1996. I therefore worked for 15 years as an employee and 15 years as a shareholder, in the company now called Alstef Group, which employs 800 people, including 500 in France.

Before my adventure with Alstef, I worked in the oil industry for the equipment of deep-sea fields, just after obtaining my engineering degree at ENSTA Paris Tech and sailing across the Atlantic. I then joined the PSA group as methods manager at the Aulnay plant. It was there that I discovered the automation of industrial processes and the importance of controlling flows, which were to become an important part of my daily life a few years later at Alstef.

ALSTEF in a few words



We have locations in a dozen of countries on 5 continents (Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Mexico, India, etc.). With its subsidiaries Alstef Automation, BA Systèmes and Glidepath, the Group designs, installs and maintains automated storage, sorting and order preparation systems for intralogistics, airports and couriers, in 70 countries around the world.

Every year, for the past 5 years, we have recorded an average growth of 15%. We therefore expect to achieve a turnover of around 200 million euros in 2022!

Industry Leaders In the Spotlight

Biggest challenge for the industry?



In our professions, there is no shortage of challenges! I identify three main ones.

The first concerns the development of cybercrime, which no longer only impacts intangible data but which can shut down production and logistics sites. Indeed, today, everything is connected, which multiplies the entry points for hackers and weakens all levels of the company. As a supplier of automated systems, we must consider this growing threat and respond to it.

Another hot topic for our industries: the war for talent and labour shortage in many areas. It is urgent to promote technical courses in secondary school and to welcome young people more widely into our companies to contribute to their training. At Alstef Group, 25 young people are currently on work-study programs in our various businesses, i.e. 5% of our workforce in France. I think that the tension on skills will last and that we will have to take it into account in our growth strategies.

Another major challenge we face is the scarcity of land, which will require that the contradictory regulations currently in force in France be reviewed. I am thinking in particular of the difficulties of constructing high-rise storage buildings when we are also trying to protect agricultural land and natural areas with the objective of zero net artificialisation of the soil by 2050!

How has COVID-19 changed the landscape?



The pandemic and the resulting lockdowns have changed people's relationship to work. Our customers did not wait for the pandemic to work on the ergonomics of their workstations, but the latter gave them a push to think it through even further. On the other hand, the pandemic has increased the need to find meaning in one's work. Automation and robotisation restore value into their work by increasing the responsibility of operators (supervision, follow-up on faults, interfacing with modern tools, etc.), while eliminating painful tasks with low added value.

We therefore anticipate an increase in demand for our systems in the months and years to come. That is why we currently have around a hundred recruitments in progress for various functions (R&D, engineers, technicians, etc.).

Industry Leaders In the Spotlight



Benefits of adapting to the challenges and changing landscape?



As Charles Darwin, the father of the theory of evolution, said, "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent; it is the one most adaptable to change". We try to put this theory into practice by being agile and able to respond quickly to the new challenges of our customers. We use our expertise and experience to replicate best practices across industries.

For example, the experience gained in cyber security in airports with the European SATI project during which we developed a digital twin to test the resistance of our software to cyber-attacks, allows us to integrate the cyber security dimension from the start of our intralogistics projects.

In the same logic, our experience of more than 20 years in AGVs has enabled us to develop a luggage vehicle (BagXone) in record time, with a first order for Belgrade airport. The aviation sector is indeed evolving and looking for the "right investment", with solutions that can easily evolve with the increase in air traffic.

We do not want to reinvent the wheel each time but transfer our skills and know-how from one sector to another.

What is coming in the next 5 years for you and your company?



Our industry has already experienced profound changes in recent years and there is no doubt that we will experience more over the next five. We will adapt as we always have. The key is to remain faithful to the values that have made us successful: we believe in the virtues of a lasting relationship of trust with our customers. Our facilities are made to last, and we will always be there to maintain and develop them.

We also believe in the importance of the personal commitment of our team members for the success of our projects. The quality of our processes, centred around project management, makes it possible to transform this individual commitment into a collective success. At Alstef Group, the support of the teams for the company's project is reinforced by the fact that 26% of the capital is held by 200 of our employees, involving them directly in the success of the group.
