

EQUIPMENT | FRANCE

The almost total coverage of the French market by its network has required Serra to forge partnerships abroad – four new locations in Spain, one in Madagascar and another in Saint-Pierre and Miquelon have just been signed.

For the Uship CEO, if there is consolidation with the market, it is more at the equipment manufacturing level, as witnessed by the aggressive acquisition policy of Alliance Marine, than within the distribution chain. That network is still very regional. As for digital, he says it's an area where distributors need to be present. Uship has recently revamped its online presence with a new website. "A customer must be able to buy at the time he wants on our site, and be delivered to his house or at the point of sale, so says the principle of Click and Collect," claims Serra. However, the Uship CEO sees digital much more as a support, an additional service rather than the end goal, given the size limitations of the leisure marine market. "Making huge discounts on our site does not mean we will do much more volume. We are not a mass-market, we are a niche market," he maintains.

Another major equipment player is the Wichard Group. Founded in 1919 in Thiers, in the centre of France, Wichard is an industrial group supplying marine fittings to both leisure and commercial sectors and counts Profurl, Facnor, Sparcraft among its subsidiaries. With six production sites (five in France and one in the USA), the group, which employs 250 people, realised a turnover approaching €40m last year and business is said to be booming, driven in part by strategic acquisitions. In April last year, the group bought the Breton manufacturer of carbon masts Lorima, which employs 40 people, and most recently, just before Christmas, Wichard announced the acquisition of Péguet. Based in the French Alps, Péguet manufactures quick links used on anchor chains. It employs 40 people and has an annual turnover of around €4.5m.



▲ Plastimo is developing its clothing line

"From 2002, the support of our financial partners allowed us to acquire the companies that we coveted: Profurl, then

the group Losange with Facnor and Sparcraft," explains Wichard director Jean-Claude Ibos. Though the financial partner might have changed with the arrival in late 2017 of NAXICAP (Natexis and Banque Populaire), Jean-Claude Ibos remains on the lookout for more

potential acquisitions. "We are very present in the world of sailing, and in the industry. We are looking for complementary functions to what we already do. We want to strengthen ourselves in these worlds, to reach a critical size, with a company that resembles us," says Ibos, emphasising that the advantage of having a solid financial partner makes it possible to move quickly when the opportunity arises. "But without rushing," he adds. "If the opportunity does not come, we will wait." In the meantime, the group's strategic focus remains on optimising and developing its industrial processes and 'Made in France'

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products, increasing margins and ratcheting up innovation.

ENGINES

Three manufacturers are competing for the French outboard market: Japanese firms Yamaha and Suzuki and Mercury Marine in the US, each one with about a quarter of the overall market share. For Suzuki, which claims to have gained 10% market share in five years, France is its second largest market after the US. "We've sold 17,000 engines a year for the last three years, that compares to around 12,000 units during the crisis," said Guillaume Vuillardot, director of marine activity for Suzuki. As far as the inboard market is concerned, major player Yanmar has revised its network in France, taking over direct distribution, after a long collaboration with Fenwick.

EXPANDING NETWORKS

French engine mariniser Nanni has announced a new strategic partnership with Swedish engine manufacturer Scania. The two companies have decided to join forces to improve opportunities for marine recreational and commercial applications. This agreement strengthens the Nanni product base, with an increased maximum power output now reaching 1,200 hp, targeting vessels ranging from 50ft-80ft. The Franco-Italian engine manufacturer is pursuing the development of its international network, with the signing of a partnership in Latin America. Fibrecon

Marine, based in Lima, Iquitos and Piura, Peru, will be responsible for importing Nanni engines into the country, as well as developing the brand in Ecuador, Chile, Panama and Argentina.

For more on Nanni, see IBI's engine report on p62. **IBI**



▲ Above: Alliance Marine's Jean-Paul Roche. Left: Uship's CEO Stephan Serra

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