

Inspiring the next generation of engineers

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Karen Bomba, president of Smiths Interconnect

Smiths Interconnect's president, **Karen Bomba** looks forward to meeting the challenges of 2020 based on the successful results of 2019.

From a young age I was interested in maths and science subjects. I had to maintain my own motorcycle, boat and later, my first car. So, it seemed natural to focus on engineering.

My main interest was in mechanical engineering that started me on this career track. Back in the 1980s I noticed how the Japanese manufacturing marketplace was not only catching up with the western world in quality and productivity, but also employee involvement and engagement. They seemed to be accelerating with really interesting

ideas and product introductions, and I realised this needed to continue elsewhere in the world. So, I decided to train in mechanical engineering with a focus on manufacturing excellence.

Having graduated with an engineering degree, I started my career at Northrop Corporation, where I ultimately advanced to a position of being in charge of a team 140 engineers. After, Northrop, I worked at HITCO and in different companies of the Safran Group including Morpho Detection before becoming the president of Smiths Interconnect.

In my career progression, I have always been passionate about women in engineering, and I strongly believe that girls need to be educated into the merits of engineering and the interesting careers available within this area from a really early age. Understanding that girls often lose interest in STEM subjects around the age of 11, I believe better education into these topics, and why it is cool to be an engineer or scientist, plus encouragement to find out what really interests them is imperative in schools today. This process, I believe, should start at an early age and can be further enhanced by society as a whole – where family and friends can encourage girls towards technical games, pursuits and interests.

As the president of Smiths Interconnect, I have led the Division back to growth, and designed a new strategic approach that is now starting to bear fruit. Our strategy for growth is supported by five strategic pillars that are underpinned by organisational enablers and targeted investment needs.

The main change to our strategy is the way we view our market segments. We are broadening our customer base and the markets we work in, progressing to the three overarching market segments of aerospace & defence, industrial and communications. The focus is on our enabling technologies for these market segments. This segmentation improves the way we prioritise opportunities, based on their technological content.

We have advanced customer intimacy through dedicated business managers and support teams who are assigned to facilitate and manage interactions with key customers from design, through to sales and production.

As part of our strategy for growth, we have now established a legal entity in Bangalore, India to develop promising local market segments. Equally, we are deepening our localisation in China. Our new factory in Mianyang is another step in Smiths Interconnect's plan to participate in the strategic development of the 'Made in China 2025' initiative.

We are heavily investing in R&D and technology with both standard platforms of products and capabilities from which customers can order or request customisation. Our team of

engineering resources are developing emerging technologies to the level where they can be applied to Interconnect's portfolio of new products.

We have recently opened a new qualification and test laboratory in Dundee, Scotland, which we see as a game changer – both in terms of how we will work with our customers and partners, and how it will allow us to pursue more opportunities in the future.

Investing in our people, we've created early career programmes to attract talent inside our organisation, as well as leadership training programmes to retain and develop them.

Finally, we have completed the acquisition of Reflex Photonics to complement our product offering with the addition of a core fibre optic capability that will help address the needs arising from high speed data transmission in high reliability applications.

Looking back, I cannot help being proud of our achievements, so far. Year 2020 is expected to be challenging, and we are committed to making it even more successful than the previous one.

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