

CASE STUDY

#06: Milmeq

easysteel.
A FLETCHER BUILDING COMPANY

Building on trust



Milmeq is a global leader in technologies for the protein processing industry - exporting to customers around the world and winning a string of business and innovation awards. In recent times, Easysteel has played a key role in further developing one of Milmeq's major breakthrough technologies.

Milmeq designs and manufactures specialist capital plant equipment for the production of meat and other primary produce. Most of Milmeq's 150-strong team are based at their manufacturing site in Dunedin, with business operations run from Auckland and Brisbane.

The company has a proud history of innovation - dating back to the 1950s - when it set out to improve refrigeration for New Zealand's burgeoning primary-produce exports. Today, Milmeq is one of the few companies in the world that provides total solutions for end-to-end processing.

A culture of innovation

The company has pioneered a number of technologies which are now recognised as setting industry standards; including inverted lamb processing, plate freezing, and chilling and freezing tunnels.

Milmeq first developed its most well-known innovation - the plate freezer - in the 1980s. This technology is now used across the international meat and dairy industry to 'fast freeze' cartons within 24 hours, resulting in extended shelf life of exported products.

Each multi-million dollar installation is custom-designed by Milmeq's engineers to meet the client's unique processing requirements.

Lisa Bicknell, Milmeq's Supply Chain Manager, explains why the steel must meet specific requirements. Although the company had been manufacturing plate freezers for more than 30 years, they decided two years ago to have the steel independently test-certified.

All the steel used in the manufacture of Milmeq's plate freezers must undergo Charpy testing - and be issued with a test certificate - to prove that it can withstand temperatures of minus 30 degrees. This laboratory testing also covers things such as earthquake compliance.

"We went to market based on those requirements," recalls Lisa.

"Easysteel was already competitive on price, but what stood out for us was their commitment to find a solution for the testing. They were the only steel supplier at the time that was willing to do that for us."



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A true partnership

Easysteel's key account manager for Milmeq, Morna Picard, immediately took up the challenge. She was assisted by Easysteel's Christchurch manager, Steve Wooddin, who had extensive experience in Charpy testing.

Morna found an Australian mill that could supply the specific type of structural and plate steel Milmeq needed, and arranged for the laboratory testing.

What was particularly impressive, says Lisa, is that Easysteel was prepared to share the risk with Milmeq in those early days.

"If any batch of steel failed the test, we couldn't use it. That means the supplier would be left with steel that had already been cut into - and some of the other steel suppliers didn't want to take that risk."

As it turned out, the testing has been a success and seamless.

"At the start we had some minor failures, but we learned from them very quickly," says Lisa.

"We now have a 100% pass rate."

As a result of the early commitment shown by Easysteel, they have since become Milmeq's preferred supplier.

"People talk about partnership in business all the time. But to us, this is the real meaning of partnership...because Easysteel were willing to take a risk to help our business. That's why they are our preferred supplier today."

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Service delivery

Lisa says Easysteel continues to work hard to provide "phenomenal" levels of customer service.

Each plate freezer job is a significant undertaking - requiring several months to build, and involving up to 30 different components.

"Morna has put in a lot of work behind the scenes to ensure further cost savings for us," says Lisa.

"For instance, because each Charpy test costs several hundred dollars, she organises a single test that will cover all different components from the same batch. Easysteel also

Snapshot on Milmeq

- A global supplier of technology to the primary food processing industry
- Export markets include Australia, North America, South America and Europe
- Developer of numerous world-firsts, including the plate freezer
- A privately-owned company that employs more than 150 staff
- Manufacturing based in Dunedin, with offices in Auckland and Brisbane

advance-delivers the steel to us in Christchurch, so as soon as the results come through, we can get it into manufacturing straight away."

Another impressive aspect, says Lisa, is the streamlined administration. Easysteel maintains accurate database records of all the mill certification, purchase orders, and results of the Charpy testing.

"If we got a customer query, even if it was years later, we know Easysteel will have the answer for us."

The success of the relationship is summed up by Milmeq Chief Executive Officer, Mike Lightfoot:

"The Milmeq brand promise is to provide equipment of the highest quality that enhances our customers' operations. As a key supplier, Easysteel is helping us to deliver on that promise."

