

ASO Safety Solutions broadens its reach

Lippstadt, Germany-headquartered GSE supplier ASO Safety Solutions has grown significantly since its establishment in 1984. Nick Klause, head of product management, looks back at 35 years of growth



ASO's Nick Klause

Can you describe ASO's growth since its foundation in the mid-1980s, and how you have developed your product offering over the years?

ASO Safety Solutions has grown from a small craft business into an international industrial enterprise. Originally a five-man company, it is now an international business with approximately 200 employees.

Since 1984, the safety of man and machine has been our biggest focus. Our core markets are in doors and gates, industrial machinery, agrarian automation, lifts and transport technology, as well as ground support equipment for the aviation industry.

Today, ASO is a global market leader for tactile safety sensors, and we also participate in many international committees in order to increase safety levels worldwide.

In addition to pressure-sensitive sensors, we also develop and manufacture safety devices such as light curtains, as well as drive controls, signal transmission systems and safety relays.

Besides our European headquarters in Lippstadt, Germany, we also have a US entity in New Jersey and a Chinese subsidiary in Nanjing. Additionally, we have a worldwide network of partners and dealers in order to ensure efficient local supply.

When and why did ASO choose to move into the aviation sector?

For some years now we have been supplying derivatives of our tactile sensors such as bumpers to manufacturers and operators of ground support equipment. We see a steadily increasing demand for safety equipment in the GSE market in the future due to new requirements in the standards and procedures associated with changing aircraft materials like carbon fibre structures.

Moreover, the latest IATA [International Air Transport Association] Airport Handling Manual (AHM) recommendation is to install pressure-sensitive safety devices on the leading edge of any potentially approaching vehicle and use the signal to prevent damage to the aircraft. Our pressure-sensitive sensors used in combination with a proximity sensor offer the optimal solution.

Has ASO developed its offering in the aviation business in recent times?

Currently, our main customers in the aviation sector are manufacturers of lifting and loading devices, both for ground handling and maintenance. Up to now, our biggest project in this area saw us support one of the world's largest aircraft manufacturers in preventing accidents during maintenance and final inspection processes, thereby offering considerable savings potential.

What does ASO provide in terms of safety products suitable for the aviation industry?

Safety contact edges and safety contact bumpers are pressure-sensitive sensors applied to ground support vehicles in order to detect any impact when approaching the aircraft. In such an event, a signal will be triggered by the vehicle's control system.

Safety edges and bumpers also absorb the momentum of the vehicle itself and provide a crumple zone, so that the risk of damage is very low even when there is contact with an aircraft.

Plus, for lifting devices like cargo loaders, very often our safety mat is used in order to detect the presence of operating personnel and thereby protect both man and machine.

What makes ASO's products particularly applicable for either airport handlers or airport maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) companies?

We operate in the safety business, and our focus is the protection of man and machine. We are active both in the OEM [original equipment manufacturer] business and in the broad field of retrofitting.

Because of our high level of competence in both areas, hardware and software, we are able to meet a wide range of customer requirements. This degree of customisation enables us to equip almost any vehicle used at airports with the right product in order to prevent damage to aircraft from collision with GSE. Moreover, the way our products are designed ensures easy mounting/installation and self-assembly on site. MRO companies, for example, do not have to stock different product models but can equip various vehicles with just one product.

In our test centre, we simulate every application, to test prototypes under the most realistic conditions possible. Our knowledge in terms of both hardware and software enables us to develop products independently without having to call on service providers.

Today, ASO is a global market leader for tactile safety sensors

Nick Klause,
ASO Safety Solutions

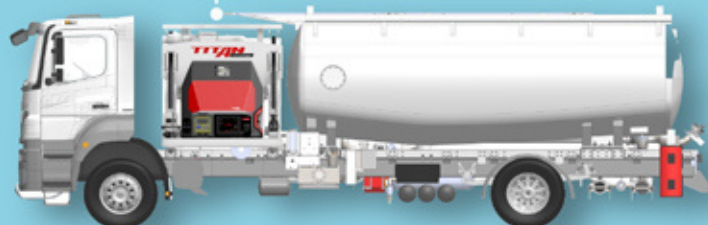
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Has ASO any plans to develop or add to its current portfolio of aviation-related safety products?

We already have a broad spectrum of tactile sensors (safety mats, edges, and bumpers). But we will supplement our product portfolio with proximity sensors, as well as with a combination of both a tactile and non-contact sensor. Our target is to provide not only components, but complete system solutions.

Our aim is not only to help airport handlers and MRO companies prevent damage but also to make unintended collisions quantitatively measurable. Our pressure-sensitive sensors allow the requisite analysis.

How else does ASO intend to improve its offering?

Our focus is on partnerships with MRO companies and GSE manufacturers. We not only want to supply standard products but also develop optimum solutions together with the customer.

This approach has already brought us high added value in other markets and distinguishes us from other safety sensor manufacturers.

For the aviation sector, attending important exhibitions and conferences (such as the GSE Expo in Las Vegas last year, the Madrid IATA Ground Handling Conference in May and *inter airport*

Europe, held in Munich in October) helps us to understand market requirements and to develop application-oriented solutions.

I can report consistently positive feedback at last year's GSE Expo in Las Vegas. We had many international airlines visiting us, together with their service companies as well as OEMs and refurbishers. Everyone was aware of the importance of sensors on GSE and maintenance vehicles.

Existing customers also reported on the durability of our products. This feedback strengthens us in our strategy – we will continue to expand our presence in the aviation market.

A JBT C15i loader with ASO's SENTIR safety contact bumper

