

# Goal! Aerospace Contacts and Tornos - a winning team!

Sal Kielbus, President of Aerospace Contacts L.L.C. in Tempe, Arizona, saw great opportunity in the United States when he emigrated from his native Poland in the mid-1980's. A graduate of metal mechanic school in Poland, Kielbus was also a mid-fielder on a semi-professional soccer team in his homeland, and he still plays today for a team in his Arizona town.

When Kielbus first came to the U.S., he worked for the same company as his father, Arizona Electrical Products, a medium-sized machine shop that assembled connector components. Sal started to operate three-cam screw machines, the beginning of his adventure with Swiss automatics, and after five years, he was running the company.

"Because of my experience running that shop and the assembly area," says Kielbus, "I got to know the end product. This helps me still today because I know what my customers are looking for. I can often advise my customers what kind of problems they might run into because I have already done what they are doing now myself. I also got experience hiring people, quoting, negotiating, managing contracts, and learning everything involved in running a company. One of the most important things I learned was how to maintain a family-oriented atmosphere."

## **Contacts and the personal touch**

In 1999, Kielbus founded Aerospace Contacts L.L.C. "At Aerospace Contacts, we are not just numbers. I like



*Aerospace Contacts L.L.C., located in Phoenix, Arizona.*

to keep the personal touch." Kielbus' dedication to his staff is evident right on the homepage of Aerospace Contacts' website, where the whole team is pictured.

Recently Kielbus sold his original building and more than doubled his company's floorspace to 21,000 square feet in a new facility a few blocks away. They outgrew their old building in just three years because they kept getting new business.

## **The aerospace business soars**

Every plane has 6,000 to 7,000 connectors. And every connector can have up to 300 contacts. The sensor-wire-connector assemblies show the pilot the status of everything on the plane. Every contact has two ends: a mating side – usually a socket or pin – and a termination side where wires are

attached. Contacts are family parts – they are made in all different sizes and gauges. Cycle times can be anywhere from ten seconds to a couple minutes depending on the complexity of the part and how many operations are required.

Contacts are vital to the operation of modern aircraft – and Aerospace Contacts L.L.C. is vital to the aerospace industry. The company has made contacts for the International Space Station and the Space Shuttle. The business is especially demanding. "Every process and material for a contact has to be certified. That means we have to work with our vendors, like platers, material suppliers, and other components vendors. With all these certifications you end up with a book of certifications."

True to Kielbus' character, he meets

customers personally. "I believe in personal contact – making business eye-to-eye."

**13 Tornos machines – a 24/7 operation**

The thirteen Tornos machines on the floor contribute significantly to Aerospace Contacts' success. So much so, that four more Tornos machines were on order at the time of this article's publication. In fact, Kielbus considers the Tornos machines some of the most important members of the Aerospace Contacts team, as they run 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. (Truly – last year they were even producing parts on Christmas!) And four to five of those hours each day are unattended. A camera connected to the Internet allows Kielbus to check on his machines remotely. Kielbus has used the remote monitoring in sales situations as well. "In aerospace," he notes, "some companies won't give you the business until they see you – their work is too important to give to a company running out of a garage. So, when I'm meeting with them I say, 'We can see it right here, right now, live.' Then they see our quality manual, and we get the order."

**Speed – important in soccer and manufacturing**

Kielbus increasingly finds himself competing with companies in Switzerland on volume orders. "That's why they call them Swiss automatics, right?" he jokes. "They do the contacts very efficiently. I had a contact with gold plating that cost me five cents. Switzerland provided a whole contact, manufactured and plated, for four. I don't know how

they do that. But when we win against Switzerland, we win on the speed. And running seven days a week, 24 hours, helps too. So we try to be the emergency source. I have customers who come to me and say, 'I've already talked to six shops, and if you're not going to help me, I don't know who will.' And we do. We do the impossible. Our saying in the shop is, 'The possible we do today. For the miracle, we need 24 hours.'

"For example, just recently we had a customer in California who gave us four small orders on Friday. So, Monday I called my customer and asked him, 'How do you want to ship the parts?' And he tells me to ship them when I have them. And I say, 'I'm asking you how?' And he goes, 'That's impossible! Red, UPS!' And the next day I get the e-mail: 'Wow!'

"In order to keep our edge, we have to have the capacity. If we are already running seven days a week, 24 hours, there is only one way we're going to get capacity – get more machines."

**Gaining the information edge, offering engineering support**

Back in 1999, the industry was growing so much that everybody who wanted to could make a business. Kielbus estimates that about 75% of the work at that time was commercial and about 25% was military. Then September 11th came and the industry saw big changes as a lot of shops went down.

But at the same time a lot of new programs for the military were released. "That's when my engineer-



ing background – my ability to understand the part drawings and communicate with the engineers – set our company apart," Kielbus recalls. "I offered my existing customers and prospective customer help with design and sent samples at no charge. My only request was, 'When the order comes through, please come to me.' And I've got to say, they responded well. Because I helped them, they helped me. Even my competition called me to ask, 'What do you know that we don't know? What's happening that you are getting the business? You are buying machines!'"

*Sal Kielbus, President of Aerospace Contacts L.L.C. in Phoenix, Arizona.*





Aerospace Contacts offers its customers advice about materials, heat treatments, functionality, dimensioning, compliance to specifications, and any knowledge required to manufacture a contact. They even organize seminars for their customers to share ideas and knowledge. "Everybody appreciates the seminars," Kielbus says. "We want all our customers to be their best. Because that's the only way we can keep the business here in the U.S. Otherwise it's *all* going to go to offshore."

Kielbus has seen many of his competitors lose business to overseas alternatives. "We see a lot of molding and stamping already going

out there. So the next step is going to be manufacturing. You've got to try new things. You can't just stand in the same place. If you are standing in the same place, you are going backwards. So we help our customers develop the new stuff. That's my approach to the industry and that's why we get along very well with the engineers – because that's what they want to do. We work together – that's what it's all about. Teamwork. Like soccer."

On the customer appreciation page of the Aerospace Contacts website, you can see just how far some of its clients have gone to express their gratitude for excellent work and helpful service provided by the com-

pany. "The Southwest Microwave story is interesting," Kielbus relates. "When they came to us, they didn't believe anyone could help them because their part was so challenging. But we worked together and solved their problems and became their Vendor of the Year. They gave us a plaque and bought pizza for everybody in the shop and assembly." He attributes that success to an ability to work on new ideas and methods with the engineers.

***Tornos' role on the Aerospace Contacts team***

"The Tornos machines are designed to make the contacts," explains Kielbus. "I like the attachments – and the spindles in the machines are independent so you can do so many things at the same time. One operation doesn't eliminate another one. I like the flexibility of the Tornos machines. And it's all-around a good machine and keeps tight tolerances. And that's what we need."

"We are running seven days and week, 24 hours a day with minimum downtime. And the Tornos machines hold that tight schedule. Even my DECOs from 1999 are still keeping the tight tolerances. The machines are also built very well. For all the DECOs I have ever owned or operated, I think I only had to replace one ballscrew."





**Tornos improves its moves**

"The TB-DECO is a very good control," says Kielbus. "I think it's fast." He also thinks the change to the TB-DECO that allows ISO (Fanuc language) is a good one. "I think that's going to help Tornos. Because I started with TB-DECO control, I know the language. But if you have operators who know only the Fanuc language, then they are limited from using the full capacity of the machine. The addition of this language

will be great. I think Tornos is doing lots of good stuff now. They have made quite a few improvements. For example, the new extended hours for shipping spare parts at Tornos compensates for the time difference between Connecticut and Tempe, Arizona."

Just as Kielbus is a great resource for his customers, Tornos is an important resource for Aerospace Contacts.

Kielbus likes Tornos' new Direct Connect service. "You can send a question to the service department over the website and they will respond in an hour. That's a good thing. I have worked with Roland Schutz in service quite a lot. He is a very good guy – very knowledgeable and helpful. Paul Cassella in applications is also very good. If I have a part and I'm looking for the best time, I will send him the

drawing and he'll get the best cycle time and then he will explain to me why, and what he's doing. Then I can approach this with my new customers."

Kielbus is also impressed by Tornos' new President. "I met Scott Kowalski at IMTS. We discussed certain things and I am finding that they are very flexible and responsive to certain ideas. They look at the customer side also. They have very good people."

**"The world is shrinking. It's important to have people you know all over. It's important to have contacts."**

**Undefeated in Scottsdale, AZ**

Like Kielbus' undefeated team in the Scottsdale soccer league, Aerospace Contacts and Tornos are winning operations. "Engineering. Speed. Good quality," notes Kielbus. "That's what makes us grow.

"I just feel like I have a lot to be thankful for in America and the people I have been associated with... Everybody says that – but I really do mean it. I think this is a great country and should be appreciated. I love what I do. I like to talk with engineers about their projects, and spending an hour talking about the way they work, and how they have a real passion for their work, too. So we talk about aerospace business, the satellites, what they can do, and what we can do for them, and then I feel like I serve my industry. That's my passion – next to the soccer." ■

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