Marketing Director, ***Rob ter Brake***

Focussing on high end solutions, Observator Instruments supplies single product and total systems focussed on meteorology, hydrology, air and climate technology and process monitoring. Shell, BP, Mearsk, Boskalis and Van Oord are among major clients of this Dutch headquartered company. “Impossible is not a term we recognise,” said Sales and Marketing Director Rob ter Brake. Report by Colin Chinery.

The Name for all WEATHERS

Precision real-time weather observations and data are critical in the marine and offshore sectors; information that is crucial to safety and operational efficiency.

On a SBM platform 250 km off Nova Scotia, wind, temperature, humidity, rain, visibility, cloud base and waves are all analysed in a weather system devised, created and installed by Observator Instruments.

Oil and gas giants such as Shell, BP and Total, together with their operators, depend daily on weather data provided by this Dutch-headquartered global leader in process monitoring instrumentation and telemetry and visualisation tools.

Observator Instruments’ weather stations are installed on pipe laying vessels, semi-submersibles, drill ships, jack-ups, and fixed and transfer platforms. Mearsk, ENSCO and China National Offshore Company are among its list of long-established clients.

Install and Forget

“Our instruments are used in the harshest and most demanding environments, and we claim that our systems are built to ‘install and forget,’” said Sales and Marketing Director Rob ter Brake.

The oldest partner in the Observator Group, and with a legacy reaching back to 1924, Observator Instruments supplies single product and elaborate total systems focussed on meteorology, hydrology, air and climate technology and process monitoring.

Headquartered in Ridderkerk – from where products are shipped all over the world – Observator Instruments has some 80 employees, with offices in Amsterdam, Hamburg and Melbourne, with new locations imminent in Athens, Singapore and Belgium.↘

"The Observator keywords are good quality and reliable data, shown in a way the end user can understand and work with. We don't offer the cheapest but always the best possible solution for our customer."

Observator Instruments delivers a wide range of wind sensors designed for the hardest environmental conditions, including cloudbase sensors measuring height as well as amount, and visibility sensors configured for accurate measurement in conditions ranging from densest fog to very clear air.

Observator and its Obsermet solution are a frequent choice for windfarm projects, with measurements of windspeed direction, temperature, humidity, barometric pressure, cloud base and visibility as well as wave height.

Dutch and overseas harbour authorities also use Obsermet systems to gather local real time meteorological and hydrological parameters like wave and current data, while many container terminals worldwide are standardised on Observator Met warning and wind alarm systems.

Observator's tank gauging system, based on the bubbler measurement principle, has also proved to be very reliable for decades under the most demanding conditions worldwide. "These systems are used to balance floating platforms, heavy lifts or docks," said Mr ter Brake. "It enables the operator to lower and raise the ship in a safe and controlled way."

Observator Vision, a sister division, focuses on window wipers and sunscreens, predominantly maritime although increasingly growing across other markets.

Used in wheel houses ranging from inland vessels to sea going tankers, window wipers and the sunscreens ensure a clear view from the bridge. Observator Vision has designed and developed the Visi-Plus line of sunscreens, with all production activities centred within a special workshop in Ridderkerk.

Proven Dutch Quality

"Together with our customers we try to determine the best solution for their problem, developing solutions that last and are of proven Dutch quality," said Mr ter Brake. "We only use products that are proven to be suitable in the harshest environments.

"We try to use as much of our own equipment – equipment built to last – but since it doesn't make sense to make restrictions, in the majority of solutions we are building, we use a 50-50 mix of our own products and those available on the market.

"Even if not all equipment we use is Dutch, as a Dutch company we guarantee the quality of the solution we design and deliver. It is equipment you can install and forget, with 24/7 worldwide support.

For offshore helicopter approach, as well as safe operations and reducing downtime, Observator has designed and developed a helideck monitoring system, compliant with international offshore standards such as CAP-437.

CAP 437 provides guidance specific to helicopter landing areas, stipulating that offshore installations and vessels must be equipped with an automated system that measures and displays real time data such as wind speed and direction, cloud amount and height of base and visibility. ↘

In addition to the CAP-437 regulation, Observator's HMS can also use weather and wave forecast information. "Our partner, MeteoGroup, sends this information to our server in Ridderkerk where all data is processed and sent to the site every 12 hours."

MeteoGroup uses models to forecast weather and wave conditions, using the high quality data of the Observator systems to calibrate the models on the specific circumstances at the site.

Together with Amarcon (an ABB group affiliate), Observator is currently working to integrate the forecasts of the movement of a ship or floating platform to further optimise its HMS. "Using our systems, a vessel or helicopter can determine if it will be safe to land or dock even before leaving base.

"On a ship with a helicopter platform, a captain can alter the ship's course to minimise the movement of the deck just before the helicopter arrives, based on the forecast data."

HMS is also installed on a number of NUI (normally unmanned installations). Using VHF radio, a helicopter pilot, during the flight or final approach, is able not only to retrieve weather information – in spoken text – from the platform, but also ignite the landing lights remotely.

"Observator Instruments is known as a company that delivers high end solutions. Our service engineers are trained to train and our engineers do more than just their job, advising customers on possible improvements, even if our products are not involved.

No Quick Sell

"Impossible is not a term we recognise," said Mr ter Brake. "We listen to our customers and work with them. We don't walk away when things get tough, never take the easy way out and never go for the quick sell. We are building long-lasting relationships."

With a growth strategy centred on new products, acquisitions and an expanding partner and reseller networks, Observator Group, worldwide, is targeting a 2019 turnover of €20 million – a rise of €12 million compared to last year's numbers.

"We want to develop long relationships with our suppliers, have a service and support office in each of the three time zones – EU, Far East and USA – and extend our partnerships, building products that last.

"In choosing new partners, we want to be absolutely sure that the new partner adds something to our business and also that we can add something to theirs. We want to grow both businesses together; meeting the very highest possible specifications of our customers." ■