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Powersoft today - Carlo, Claudio and Luca Lastrucci with Antonio Peruch

THINK OF THE NAME POWERSOFT, AND IT'S HARD NOT TO immediately think of power amplifiers. Over the course of two decades, the manufacturer has become an integral part of the amplification sector – its rack-mount amps can be found in installations and on touring riders globally, while its modules are hidden within the enclosures of a wealth of leading loudspeaker specialists. It is the kind of brand recognition that many companies would envy.

But just because that's what the pro audio industry has come to expect from Powersoft, doesn't mean that the Italian company entirely agrees. As much as its founders declare themselves humbled by their success to date, they also believe that it is part of a far longer journey. From the very beginning, they say, Powersoft has been concerned not with the application of technology, but with the development of technology itself. Nor are they unjustified in that assertion. Having introduced the professional audio industry to the benefits of switch-mode amplification, Power Factor Correction (PFC), Differential Pressure Control (DPC) and much more besides, the company they started around a kitchen table in 1995 has long since proven itself as an incubator of innovation. Now, as it enters its third decade, it's time for the next stage of its evolution.

'The time has come for us to choose what will happen next now that we have come of age, now that Powersoft has reached adulthood,' explains managing director Luca Lastrucci. 'Professional audio is a niche market, and amplification is a niche of that niche – we can't continue to only build amplifiers, we will do more.'

What the next stage will look like is, as yet, unclear, though the technology that is currently emerging from the company's headquarters in Florence offers a hint of what's to come. 'M-Force is an example,' continues the MD. 'Deva is another example. We are looking to develop ideas that are near to but also outside of the amplification niche. We will enlarge our market using the competences we already have inside the company.'

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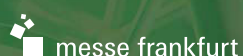
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If it seems surprising that the ideas currently outnumber the strategies, then consider the fact that it was with exactly that philosophy that Powersoft was founded. In the mid-1990s, when newly graduated brothers Luca and Claudio Lastrucci sat down to plot their futures, ideas were all that they had. Luca, the elder by two years, was absorbed in software and the possibilities of artificial intelligence. In contrast, Claudio was an electronics engineer, fascinated by power management and hardware. There was little to bind them together in terms of business.

Yet the brothers had a common link – music. 'We used to enjoy playing music in pubs and bars,' recalls the managing director. 'I play piano and Claudio plays piano and drums.'

'It all comes from music,' agrees Claudio Lastrucci, now Powersoft R&D director. 'That's true of a lot of people here. I would say that half of the people here are musicians. Not professionals, of course, though maybe some of them are more professional than others! But it's inside the nature of the people here to love music – it's where the passion comes from. It's the same today as it was then – music is what we all have in common.'

Yet as easy as it could be to draw a clear line from their musical

background to their current success in the audio world, the path of the Lastrucci brothers was more complicated than that. Having decided to start a company with Claudio's long-term friend Antonio Peruch (and later on their father, Carlo, who became president of the company in 1999), they looked at their wide ranging skills and interests, and elected to try a little of everything.

'It was supposed to be an engineering company,' recalls Claudio. 'It was the three of us collecting projects from various customers and doing the designs for many strange things – not only audio devices but automatic voice recognition systems, software, power conversion technologies and supply systems...' Antonio Peruch remembers 'selling computers, conducting the installation of software and so on. Then we stopped and thought about what we could do'.

The name itself was easier to choose, reflecting the partners' twin interests of power and software. 'It was fun because we gained an insight into many different topics and technologies,' adds the R&D director. 'We came to understand how to approach different technological problems and how to solve them.'

It was a time, he recalls, when the lack of a firm strategy and the



Inside the original Digam

freedom to make mistakes were perhaps the fledgling company's most valuable assets. 'Not every donut comes out with a hole!' he grins, 'I strongly believe that if you want evolution then you have to make many mistakes. This is how it works in the real world – genetic evolution comes from mistakes. If



From humble beginnings the first home of Powersoft

you do not make mistakes then you cannot jump the border between convention and innovation.'

The first example of that philosophy in action was the company's debut product, which despite boasting an impressive feature-set for the mid 1990s, soon revealed that the three partners still hadn't found their natural home. 'the first design was intended as a hi-fi amplifier,' explains Luca, while his brother adds that the product was 'extremely complex with a very high switching frequency, 1MHz of sampling with very high power. We tested it with some users and of course in the blind test it was a success, but this was in the 1990s and it was too far ahead of its time, too advanced. But through that mistake we realised that maybe the professional market was more ready for the product.'

The reason, continues Luca, was the use of a technology that has since defined Powersoft's reputation within the professional industry –



Musicians from the beginning, the future business partners play a gig in November 1983



In the beginning – Luca Lastrucci, Claudio Lastrucci and Antonio Peruch in the early days of Powersoft

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switch-mode amplification. 'When we saw the potential of Class-D, we knew that we could reach huge power,' he says, 'so we targeted the professional market.' It proved to be a watershed moment not just for Powersoft but for the broader pro audio industry. It is no exaggeration to say that switch-mode technology changed the rules in professional amplifier design.

But, declares Claudio, 'it was nothing new! As a concept, it had been proven for many years. There are switch-mode power supplies using tubes. Its application within the audio domain was also known but at the time there were many constraints against providing a consistent performance and enough of everything to be applied in a high power audio domain. Nobody had approached it with one solution – a finished product. But as with everything, once that leap has been taken, it's much easier to repeat it. Nowadays if you don't have a switch-mode amplifier then you are virtually out of the market.'

At the time, the partners were still running the company from the same kitchen table, but they nevertheless entered the world of professional audio for the first time with the kind of confidence that only comes with youth. 'When you are young, you are brave!' laughs Claudio. 'You don't have too much to risk and that's the strength of young companies. What do you have to lose? Nothing! That was the spirit that helped us in that period.'

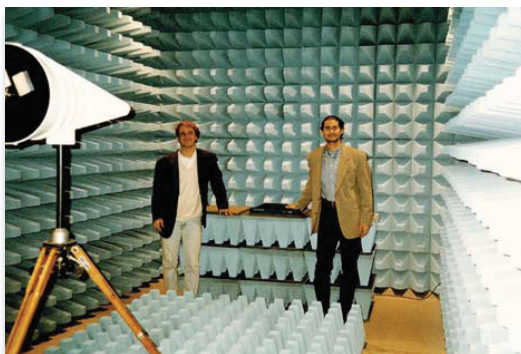
Their mutual friend, Mr Peruch, remembers it slightly differently. 'We were not ready..' he declares with a laugh. 'We had no idea, no tools, no instruments, not much of anything that we needed to grow. We had to build everything, learn how to do a contract with our first customer, how to conduct an interview with the first employee and then how to manage their payment. There were so many problems to solve every day. Then of course you have to build, manufacture, and test the products. You have to organise distribution and build a sales network. Now we know how to do all of these things, but 20 years ago after we had just finished university, we had no idea. We didn't know that it would grow.'

Grow it did, but at its own pace.

'It took quite a long time,' agrees Claudio. 'As a young company we knew what we had was unbelievable and I was sure that within two years the whole world would be working with switch-mode technology. It did eventually happen but it was more than 10 years later.'

Nor did the company stick exclusively to audio. Again reflecting the fact that it has always seen itself first and foremost as a developer of technology, while Claudio Lastrucci and Antonio Peruch were respectively busy pioneering the amplifier side of the company and developing production processes, Luca Lastrucci was exploring the application of artificial intelligence and helping to revolutionise the public transport mobility system across much of Italy.

Those days are now largely gone



Claudio Lastrucci and Antonio Peruch testing the Digan 5000 in an anechoic chamber in 2000

and the 20-year old business is almost entirely focused on pro audio. Nevertheless, it makes the point that as important as amplifiers have been to Powersoft over the years, the company has always been quick to embrace a new idea.

'The nature of the company and the attitude of the owners has always been to invest and evaluate opportunities for growth,' reasons Francesco Fanicchi, the brand and corporate director, who joined the company in 2012 and is currently helping to spearhead the manufacturer's education effort, promoting global seminars that deliberately avoid talk of sales. 'The purpose is to explain technology without trying to sell a product,' he explains. 'If you are seeking to educate people then I think it's



The President, Carlo Lastrucci

wrong to have a hidden purpose of selling to them. We believe that if we educate end-users then they will know what to buy.'

In full agreement is Luca Giorgi, who joined the industry as well as the company in 2007, and has since become a well-known ambassador for the brand internationally. 'When I joined Powersoft I was unaware of any concept related to this market, but I understood that this was an engineering company with a lot of ideas,' he explains. 'We position ourselves as an amplification company but when you start dealing with software and processing and now with M-Force, I think it is clear that really we bring technologies to the market as tools for doing things better. We believe that we have a role of bringing innovation and I think we are pretty good at doing it.'

M-Force is indeed an excellent example of how Powersoft is once again flexing its R&D muscles. Described by the company as a true push-pull moving magnet transducer, it is based on switch-mode principles but now with the added benefits of 20 years of improvements in the technology, plus new materials, hugely increased DSP power and the creation of Differential Pressure Control. When used alongside the accompanying M-Drive (to create the M-System), it can form the backbone of a truly earth-shaking subwoofer.

'We believe that M-Force is a revolutionary technology for subwoofers,' says Luca Lastrucci.



Deva is just one example of how Powersoft is more than just an amplifier manufacturer

'It will be like Class-D – everybody will eventually use it.' Tellingly, he is quick to add that this does not mean Powersoft will be entering the subwoofer business in its own right. 'Our strategy, our interest is to provide the technology, not the final product,' he clarifies. His brother Claudio adds that 'M-Force is one example of how things can be done differently because of the exploitation of switch-mode technology, but it is only one example. There are things going on inside of Powersoft that will move us further towards merging technologies and mixing things together'.



Powersoft's Luca Giorgi

If that sounds ambitious then consider Deva, the manufacturer's solar-powered tour-de-force of technologies, incorporating an 8-inch speaker and Class-D amplification for BGM and paging, plus video surveillance capabilities, Wi-Fi and GPS to name but a few of its many features. The system is unlike anything else in the market. 'But it's still within our core competences,' reasons the R&D director. 'With our mobility division, the software, our systems knowledge and audio, of course.'

Powersoft, it seems, is approaching its next era with the same drive and enthusiasm that characterised its first two decades. 'It's gone so quickly,' marvels Claudio, when asked if it feels as if that much time has passed. 'But there are no regrets about anything because we've been having fun for 20 years. It's a hard job and there are a lot of things to be done, but we're still very passionate.'

'It has gone fast,' agrees Luca Lastrucci, 'but we still enjoy it, and that's the most important thing. It's having the possibility of thinking of an



Luca Lastrucci

idea and deciding to go for it. We're not encumbered by our own structure – we're a family company and if we decide to move in a certain direction then it's very easy to do.' So what will the next direction be? 'Technology is our focus,' he concludes, 'it is the core of the company'.

Think of the name Powersoft, and it's hard not to immediately think of power amplifiers, but also Class-D, Power Factor Correction, new ways of driving subwoofers, surveillance technologies and solar power – the list of technology goes on. And it's getting longer.

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