South Bay Cable: Celebrating a Golden Anniversary

50 Years Under the Same Ownership and Management, the Company Draws from the Past and Looks to the Future

In 1956, Gordon Brown saw a unique opportunity. At the time, if a buyer wanted to purchase cable, he could choose from a list of stock products. However, cables, which combined a variety of different components, were not readily available. Brown thought, “Why not set up and produce cables specific to the customers’ needs with relatively short deliveries?”

In 1957, the vision turned into reality, and South Bay Cable Corp. was established.

The company had very humble beginnings. With the help of Brown’s wife Joyce, the first cables were laid by hand in their garage. In September 1957, the company moved to an industrial facility in Gardena, California. As the business grew, a second manufacturing facility, located just down the street, was opened in 1967. By the late 1960s, the Gardena area was becoming increasingly crowded, so South Bay Cable decided to move the company to a more rural setting. In 1970, South Bay Cable relocated to its current location in Idyllwild, California. Idyllwild is a small mountain community located approximately 100 miles southeast of Los Angeles. In 1986, a second manufacturing facility was opened in Temecula, California. Currently, South Bay’s two facilities total approximately 100,000 square feet, with both facilities operating 24 hours a day.

Cable Evolution
The earliest cable constructions consisted of different types of military specification wire and specialty electrical components, which were designed by South Bay. These components included electrical conductors for power distribution, signal pairs for voice and data transmission and coaxes for video. Many of these early cables were used by the U.S. military and aerospace industry. Some of these early programs included the ground support cables for the Atlas silos, the Americas’ first intercontinental ballistic missile; the second generation of the Minuteman program’s intercontinental ballistic missiles; and Surveyor, the United States’ first robotic spacecraft, designed to test soft landing on the moon.

Requirements continued to become more demanding, and the cables became more complex. These cables...
covered a broad spectrum of uses, which included a wide band of temperature ranges, electrical characteristics and an assortment of mechanical requirements. Many of the cables were being used in harsh environments and included both above ground and underwater applications.

Working underwater presented a unique set of challenges including external hydrostatic pressure, water migration, fish bite protection and the integration of mechanical strength members into cable designs. South Bay’s engineers identified materials which were best suited for the diverse product range, and its production department refined the manufacturing processes.

“As a supplier of specialty cable, staying ahead of the learning curve is essential, and having the ability to build all phases of production is key,” said Brown.

By the early 1970s, South Bay Cable was designing and building cables for many of the pioneering companies in underwater technology. South Bay provided the interior and exterior cables for the U.S. Navy deep-dive personnel transfer capsule. They also created Sea Plow’s umbilical cables for the installation of transoceanic telephone lines and tether and umbilical cables for the then-emerging remotely operated vehicle market. Companies such as Ametek’s (San Diego, California) Straza division, Hydro Products (now defunct), International Submarine Engineering Ltd. (Port Coquitlam, Canada) and the U.S. Navy relied on South Bay’s cable constructions for many of their underwater systems.

As technology improved, the push was on to build deeper systems, which needed longer cables. Weight became an issue, and many of these longer cables were designed using new lightweight, high-strength synthetic materials. Fiber optic elements soon followed, allowing the elimination of heavy signal and communication components. These advancements, along with improvements in materials and manufacturing techniques, allowed South Bay Cable to design and build cables for use to full ocean depth.

Today, South Bay Cable continues to focus on highly engineered cables for use in dynamic applications including remotely operated vehicles, side scan sonar, tow systems, minesweepers, pipeline inspection, airborne aerostats and numerous military programs.

Production Capabilities
Since 1957, South Bay Cable has designed and produced over 60,000 different cable constructions. Each cable is designed around the customer’s needs and contains a combination of electrical, optical and mechanical elements.

“Our skilled employees take pride in the cables we build,” said sales manager, Gary Brown. “We know that consistent quality and customer satisfaction will keep South Bay Cable strong.”

South Bay Cable has the production capabilities to perform nearly all manufacturing operations in-house. From the drawing of the copper rod to the jacketing of the finished cable, South Bay has a wide variety of specialized equipment required to perform all aspects of production.

Planning for the Future
The company’s Idyllwild and Temecula facilities are located approximately 50 miles apart and have been laid out to complement each other’s manufacturing capabilities. With the close proximity of the two plants, moving products from one location to the other is done routinely.

South Bay Cable was founded on the philosophy of providing customers with solutions to their specialty cable needs, and that philosophy continues today. To provide improved service to their East Coast customers, South Bay Cable has established a field office in Raymond, New Hampshire.

A broad product base and commitment to quality and customer service, allow South Bay Cable to experience steady growth. With increased production capabilities and strong footholds in both commercial and military markets, South Bay expects this upward trend to continue. /st/

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