

AFE Receives EPIC Phoenix Award 2013 Recognizing Entrepreneurship in Photonics



Nick Martin, CEO of Advanced Fibreoptic Engineering receives the EPIC Phoenix Award 2013 from Drew Nelson, President of EPIC. The award was presented at the occasion of EPIC's 10th anniversary celebration event on 13 December 2013 in Brussels.

A fibreoptic business has been operating from the premises of Advanced Fibreoptic Engineering in Witney, Oxfordshire since 1994. The original business was an electronics distributor called GCA Electronics, who started selling infrared LEDs as one of their product lines. Customer feedback made the company realise that there was a growing demand for fibreoptic packaging of these components. Manufacturing soon dominated the business and the company became GCA Fibreoptics. The success of GCA Fibreoptics attracted the attention of the Uniphase Corporation who acquired the business in 1995. In 1998 Uniphase merged with JDS Fitel, forming JDS Uniphase (JDSU). In 2000, JDSU decided to close the Witney facility and transfer production to a new facility in Yarnton. In January 2001 the Yarnton facility opened at a cost of \$18 million. Three months later the facility was closed as the telecom bubble exploded, with serious consequences for many photonics companies throughout the industry.

During 2001, a management buyout created Afonics, who returned from Yarnton to the smaller Witney facility. Afonics grew strongly from 2001 through to 2005, but never achieved profitability. In May 2005 Afonics went into administration. Advanced Fibreoptic Engineering (AFE) was formed in June 2005, with 7 key staff and worked very closely with a few large customers to rapidly set up a much smaller and efficient business. Many hard lessons learned from Afonics have been successfully applied to the AFE business. In the early days it was essential to ensure that costs were controlled and that products were built and supplied to customers on time with high yield. Monitoring and maintaining high levels of yield, low cost and on time shipments continues to be central to its manufacturing. Maintaining good customer and supplier relationships has been and continues to be an important part of its success.

The business is currently in its 9th year of profitable trading and has grown steadily, doubling sales since 2005. AFE currently employs 32 staff plus 4 contract staff and have a turnover approaching \$8 million. AFE recognises that the experience and commitment of all its staff is essential to its continuing success and have recently started working towards the Investors in People Standards. In 2010 and again in 2013 AFE was awarded an "Outstanding Supplier" award from Fluke Networks, out of a supply base of 2500 suppliers. AFE has continued to develop its original component business and alongside that have developed an expanding module design and assembly business. AFE is continually looking outwards for new market opportunities whilst ensuring that it supports all of its existing customers.