



SES

'WORKING FIRST TIME, EVERY TIME' IS THE KEY MANTRA AT POWER DISTRIBUTION SPECIALIST SES ENTERTAINMENT SERVICES. THE COMPANY HAS GAINED AN ENVIALE REPUTATION IN BOTH THE EVENTS AND FILM AND TV INDUSTRIES. 2014 SEES SES CELEBRATING ITS 20TH ANNIVERSARY AND THERE IS PLENTY TO LOOK BACK ON AND MUCH TO LOOK FORWARD TO. SIMON DUFF WENT TO THE COMPANY HQ IN DATCHEL, BERKSHIRE TO TALK TO MARK COOPER, MD AND BEN STEARN, NATIONAL SALES MANAGER.

In 1988, brothers Mark and Gordon Cooper formed a company to manufacture and sell electrical equipment to the construction industry. It wasn't until 1994 that SES Film & TV was formed as a trading division and a limited company. Since then it has become a leading manufacturer of power distribution products for the entertainment industry. The company is a member of Plasa and is a BS EN ISO 9001 : 2008 accredited organisation. The Cooper brothers, a third director Kim Brant and 15 full time staff are rightly proud of what they have achieved. The company's clients rank among the most prestigious names in both the event and film industries. Warner Bros, PRG, HSL, Major Tom, White Light, Skan PA and Autograph Sound are just a few of the names which regularly call on SES' services.

The key to its success is always reliability

explained Mark Cooper MD. "Most of the components we use are premium European brand circuit breakers. We don't use Chinese components. The main reason we don't do that is for reasons of pure reliability. Some of the components are designed by us and manufactured elsewhere under our control. We are not the cheapest product out there but if you want power to work first time every time we believe that we are the best and that is worth paying for. Our kit has to work every time. You cannot have a band come on and then the lights don't come on. It has to work. If one or two lights don't come on it's not the end of the world but if no lights come on or half the stage is in darkness it is a catastrophe. That is why all of our stuff goes through a very rigorous design, production and testing process. Every product that leaves this building goes with its own test certificate. It is absolutely critical to the

nature of our product."

Highlights for SES in 2013 included a lot of film work for Warner Bros, TV productions including Dr Who, Sherlock, Upstairs Downstairs, the new studios for Coronation Street and work on EastEnders. Notable music production highlights included design work for Skan PA for Muse's world tour, Major Tom on the Rod Stewart world tour in the form of a sound rack power distribution unit. Business highlights included the appointment of a distributor in Russia and significant growth in the Middle East and in particular Dubai.

Ben Stearn, Sales Manager, who joined the company in 1996, explained that expansion in Dubai and the Middle East is high on the agenda for 2014. "That region is proving to be a fantastic opportunity for us. We are on the approved suppliers list for Dubai World Trade Centre and we do the Palme exhibition every

Opposite: The SES HQ.
Below: Mark Cooper, MD; SES cable drums; Work in progress on a power distribution box.



year. At the moment we are just about to go to the next level and have our own presence there and open up a Dubai office. That looks set to happen this year. We are doing that in two stages. The first will be to have a large stock presence out there, which will be shipped out in March and stored, at one of our customer's premises. We will then have a database of stock available and all our customers in the Middle East will have access to that via a website portal. After that we will then move to the next level and open our own office. The work will be aimed at both the permanent and temporary sectors but also with the Dubai Expo 2020 very much in mind. Dubai is perfect for us. They like quality there and the thing about SES is that we are all about quality and reliability."

A measure of just how highly regarded SES is can be found in the amount of power distribution products they supplied to the London 2012 Olympic Games. The order for SES was worth in excess of £1.4 million. It supplied 1,600 units to the power generation company Aggreko alone. It also did a lot of work for the broadcast centre, the BBC and for various individual venues. Stearn added: "We started the whole process about 15 months before the Olympics opened. We bought in a separate portacabin, took on more staff and appointed team leaders from our senior staff. We designed

and manufactured about six or seven different box designs with all testing and final inspection done here by us."

Both Cooper and Stearn agree that one of the biggest challenges in the touring and events sector is timescale and turn around. Cooper explained: "Quite often a touring company will not know they have got the gig until three or four weeks before it's due to go out on the road." That said SES is constantly dealing with production companies and acts at the very top of their game. For the U2 360° tour SES supplied a large amount of power distribution products to both PRG and XL Video. Cooper commented: "It was a function of the tour that all the kit had to be brand new. None of the companies involved were allowed to supply anything from somebody else's tour or event. Everything had to be new. The lead-time for that was four to six weeks. Everything had to work first time every time. If it is a world tour timescales tend to be a bit longer as production managers know the need for power reliability in different territories has to be rock solid and that standards are not the same. That needs care and attention to ensure the supply works. That is the by word by which we live. Everything is built for reliability and it does not make any difference who it is. It's critical that everything has to work. That is why every component that we select is the best."

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Below: SES has established itself as an entertainment power specialist within the industry, using key products; The core SES team.



We tend to work with the rental houses but occasionally the production people direct. That was the case with a Flaming Lips tour where there was unusual power requirements and we were in on the planning of how that would work. They have canons and foam machines and all sorts of weird and wonderful things and that needed a lot of planning."

DESIGN AND PRODUCTS

At the heart of SES's lighting power range are a number of products including custom built 19-inch rack units for the touring industry. These complete enclosures are designed in house and are fabricated from powder coated zintec steel. The CAD design layout can be supplied to the customer before fabrication so that the layout is approved. The components are selected for their reliability, as the constant transportation of the units could induce faults in lesser quality components. The units are also constructed so that it is easy for technicians to swap out components should they become damaged. They can also engrave or silk screen ident on the units as well as supplying a flight case or building the unit into one issued by the customer.

Products manufactured for lighting include the 54 Way rack 400A input developed for PRG,

and in particular the demands and challenges presented by video walls. The Type 6 rack 400A input unit was developed for White Light, and is typically used for outdoor event work to cover both stage work and concession outlets. The 63A/Distro rack is used for single phase supply and used extensively at exhibitions. The Type 23 and Type 12 racks get used on smaller scale events. David Isherwood, White Light's Hire and Technical Director has used SES's products for many years. He is full of praise for the company. He said: "We have always enjoyed an excellent relationship with SES, working in partnership to achieve the best solutions for our ever growing and evolving requirements."

When it comes to power distribution products for sound equipment Cooper is keen to note the differences in attitude from sound production companies compared to lighting. "For sound people they are much more specific about their power requirements and metering is much more critical for them. They tend to know exactly what they want and they are very specific about what they want. They are very driven by the amplifier manufacturers because they are at the leading edge of audio power and that reflects on what we need to supply them." The World Tour Rack developed for a Skan PA world tour is a unit that operates both

in European 400V/3 and US 208V/3 systems. Autograph Sound is another long term SES customer. Jim Douglas, Senior Hire Production Engineer commented: "SES gives me small company service and attention, and big-company reliability and support. My outrageous demands and deadlines are met with good humor where possible, and with honesty where not."

Looking to the next five years Cooper has plenty of reasons to be optimistic. He said: "We own the business. It's not a public limited company. We make the decisions; we decide where we want to go and what we want to do." Looking forward he believes distribution will form a further key part of success. "The Middle East is going to be a very exciting area for us. We are investigating other market places. We have a distributor in Spain and we have representation in France and Scandinavia is a big area for us. Brazil will be another interesting area. We are also moving into the training arena with courses specifically designed for BS7909. Concluding he said: "We are a very busy outfit and we do work tirelessly to make sure our customers get what they want, more importantly, when they want it."

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