

Azelis UK

Fifty years of personal care

Azelis UK Personal Care has evolved from a small distributor of ingredients to one of the world's leading chemical distribution companies. Regional Market Manager Helen Hill looks back.

2018 is a prestigious year for Azelis UK Personal Care, as we celebrate 50 years of service to the personal care industry in the UK and Ireland. The company has come a long way from its initial start back in 1968 in Rainham in Essex, east of London.

What is now Azelis UK Personal Care was founded by Stanley Black under the name S. Black (Import & Export) Ltd., as a distributor of innovative ingredients. It initially supplied pearl pigments from Merck Performance Materials to nail lacquer producers, before expanding to offer a portfolio of major manufacturers' products to the UK personal care market.

As the company grew, it relocated to Islington, North London, in 1970, later moving to offices in nearby Cheshunt in 1985 and a newly owned warehouse in Erith, South-East London. Finally, in 1997, it moved to a purpose-built office and warehouse facility in Hertford, north of London, where it remains to this day.

The Hertford facility included a state-of-the-art personal care laboratory, which was a first in the UK. This allowed the company to develop formulations to demonstrate new materials and technologies as they came on the market and also to work closely with customers on bespoke development projects and problem-solving exercises.

Meanwhile, in 1995, S. Black GmbH had opened, giving the company a foothold in the growing German personal care market. As with the UK office, this subsidiary's new, purpose-built offices in Duisburg included a state-of-the-art formulation laboratory.



Azelis UK Personal Care is headquartered in Hertford

Part of Azelis

By its 40th year, the business covered personal care, food, pharmaceutical and fragrance ingredients in its ever-expanding portfolio. S. Black became part of the Azelis Group in 2007 and changed its name to reflect this in 2011, as Azelis became one brand across Europe, with a shared set of values.

There are now fourteen Azelis Personal Care laboratories located around the globe, including the UK, Germany, France, Poland, Japan, the US and India, each with specific areas of expertise. The laboratory in the UK, for example, has specialised expertise in colour cosmetics, while the laboratory in Germany is highly active in the development of emulsion technologies. The teams collaborate to gain new insights and identify trends for future formulations and share them with customers and principals.

Recently, the UK laboratory developed an award-winning biodegradable sheet face mask as the result of a brainstorming session with one of Azelis' key suppliers, CP Kelco. The MASKerade mask concept gives the consumer the opportunity to use a functional sheet mask, made from sustainable, inherently biodegradable, naturally sourced pectin that can be cut to any desired shape.

MASKerade also allows the formulator the flexibility to incorporate a range of water-soluble actives in an easy-to-use format. Using a cold process manufacturing method and a limited palette of ingredients, it was a perfect fit for the SCS Formulate 2017 Future of Formulation concept. Azelis was very proud to be announced as the winner of the Society of Cosmetic Scientists' Laura Marshall Memorial award for innovation that year.



The UK team hosts customer seminars, workshops and training sessions at the Hertford laboratory and at customers' own facilities. The site now includes a pharmaceutical application laboratory, a food technology laboratory, and a homecare and industrial applications laboratory, each manned by full-time product development staff.

The Hertford office is also the base for four full time technical product managers, who provide customers with regulatory information, formulation and scale-up expertise, and much needed paperwork. They also support the sales and product management teams and work closely with suppliers to bring new technologies to the market.

Another of the key differentiators for Azelis UK Personal Care is its internal sampling operation. Offering a unique, 48-hour sample service, the company has always led the way in getting the right samples out to customers as quickly as possible, so that projects in the high-pressure world of product development are not delayed waiting for samples.

Historical origins

The Azelis Group itself was established in 2001 through the merger of Novorchem, in Italy, and Arnaud, in France. Azelis, then a Luxembourg-based holding company, held 100% of

the shares of both companies.

The intention was always to set up a large distribution group covering all of Europe. As the speciality chemicals business in Europe was itself seeing extensive merger and acquisition activity, Azelis aimed to set up a distribution group that would enable these businesses to deal with a single distributor.

Arnaud had originally been founded in 1908 by Augustin Arnaud to supply French industrialists with raw materials. His son Pierre added the technical emphasis to form the world's first speciality distributor as early as 1951.

Pierre Arnaud's vision took the company into Central and Eastern Europe at the earliest opportunity after the Berlin Wall fell in 1990, with companies within the group now including Comaip and Promecome. When he died in 2001, the companies merged and became part of Azelis.

Recent additions

A year later, in 2002 Azelis acquired Chance & Hunt, a former ICI company based in Runcorn, just three years after its successful demerger from ICI. The company brought expertise in coatings, polymers and additives, food ingredients, chemical industries and nutrition to customers in the UK and Irish markets.





A year later in 2003, the company expanded again, with the acquisition of the Kraemer & Martin Group, bringing established distribution businesses in Germany, Switzerland and Austria into the fold. Kraemer & Martin was one of the first chemical companies to adopt ISO 9002, which was all part of a strategy to add value at a service and technical level.

Continuing its expansion, Azelis acquired Impex Química, an Iberian distributor with a focus on the pharmaceuticals and veterinary industries in 2004. In the same year, it also gained a presence in the important Benelux markets through the acquisition of two separate companies based in Belgium: the Sibeco Group and Sepulchre.

Sibeco, based in Oevel, offered specialist expertise in food blends and ingredients, animal nutrition and a wide range of general chemicals. Sepulchrem, a Brussels-based company, added a range of chemical specialities including rubber, plastics, coatings, adhesives and sealants (CASE) and other speciality products.

2005 saw the acquisition of Nordic distributor Broste and the opening of a strategic office in Shanghai. After the incorporation of S. Black in 2007, the company was further expanded by the addition of Tara Kimya in Istanbul, opening up important new markets in Turkey.

This company had been founded in 1986 and worked with international principals serving the paints, varnishes, inks, adhesives and construction sectors. It operated two warehouses in Istanbul, supplying both the Asian and European parts of the country. This gave Azelis a platform of skilled people and an established supply chain from which to expand into this important and growing market.

After the acquisition in 2010 of YDS Chemical, a distributor of speciality chemicals in the Benelux region, all of the original companies and brands were fully amalgamated into one

company – Azelis – serving speciality industrial sectors throughout Europe. A new head office was established in Antwerp as a base for the group management team and a number of key corporate functions, such as human resources, Corporate Communications and Legal & Compliance, IT systems and safety, health, environment and quality (SHEQ).

S&D on board

In one of the biggest additions to the Azelis group, the S&D Group, a specialist supplier of raw materials and ingredients to the pharmaceuticals, food, personal care and performance chemicals industries, joined the group in 2011.

This acquisition was strategically important as it significantly strengthened the Azelis Life Sciences business – which comprises activities in pharmaceuticals, food and healthcare, and personal care – both in terms of portfolio coverage and geographical spread.

Along with the S&D Group came S&D Aroma, a UK-based operation which specialised in sourcing sustainable essential and organic oils, butters and hydrolats from all corners of the globe.

Azelis UK was already a long-established supplier of synthetic fragrance ingredients working with some of the biggest global fragrance houses, such as IFF, Givaudan and Firmenich, to supply the UK market.





With the addition of S&D Aromas, a new division was created for the personal care market in the UK: Fragrance Ingredients & Organic Specialities.

This is based in Tur Langton in Leicestershire. Offering a full-service repackaging operation for both synthetic fragrance ingredients and organic essential oils, this gave the added value and flexibility that Azelis can provide for customers, both large and small, in today's demanding marketplace. The site is fully certified for repackaging organic products to Soil Association and COSMOS standards.

Going global

Since 2011, Azelis has opened new corporate offices in the Asia-Pacific region. Azelis APAC headquarters are located in Singapore and the region counts 21 offices which 6 are in China, 23 applications labs in 11 locations and industry dedicated sales organisations in each country.

In, 2015 the Azelis Group was acquired from 3i by Apax Partners, a global private equity firm. Apax also acquired the Koda Distribution Group

(KDG) to form Azelis Americas, which operates in the speciality chemicals distribution market in the US and Canada. This was a very significant acquisition for Azelis, expanding its footprint across North America and at the same time opening up more opportunities for customers and principals worldwide.

Azelis Americas continues to operate its market and regional brands such as Adapco, DeWolf Chemical and Glenn to name a few, formerly CEO and president of KDG, took the same roles at Azelis Americas.

The Azelis Group has recently added a number of African countries to its distribution network. In 2016, it made its first foray into West Africa via Ivory Coast, where it now operates a warehouse and technical laboratory focused on food and healthcare. Indeed, one of its most recent acquisitions, in April 2018, was that of DISTRALIM, a distributor of food ingredients and some non-food items, based in Casablanca, Morocco.

Today, Azelis Personal Care has over 4,500 customers globally and a staff of over 200 technical and commercial experts focused on the

personal care market segment.

Azelis UK retains many products and suppliers originally offered by S. Black to the personal care market and has a wide portfolio of products from basic chemicals to high tech encapsulation technology and skin care actives. It continues to offer a professional and personal service level to its customers that Stanley Black would have been proud of when he started the company 50 years ago.

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