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Industry Insider

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BC Group

by Stephen Noonoo

Founded in 1988 in St Louis, BC Group originally sold only test equipment manufactured by other companies. Since then, the company has grown to include both a manufacturing and private labeling component under its own BC Biomedical label. In 2005, Lloyd Industries, the company that engineered and manufactured most of the BC Biomedical brand products, purchased BC Group. The company's "One Stop Biomed Shop" slogan sums it up well—BC Group currently offers 75 product lines and thousands of products, including an extensive listing of test equipment, labels, cables, and everything in between, as well as comprehensive repair and calibration services. 24x7 recently spoke to President Mel Roche about industry growth, corporate philosophy, and the company's latest business move.



Mel Roche

24x7: *I hear BC Group is moving into a new facility. What are the improvements over the old one?*

Roche: We built this facility to our specific needs. It will provide us with new state-of-the-art calibration and R&D [research and development] laboratories; an expanded training center; expanded mechanical and electronic manufacturing space; and a sales, service, and general office operation tailored to the biomedical community's needs. This facility will make us even more efficient and responsive. We have a clear picture of what our customers want, and this is just another one of the steps we are taking to ensure we can provide it.

24x7: *What makes the company unique in the biomedical community?*

Roche: BC Group has a philosophy concerning our products that runs counter to the current trend of one-size-fits-all. We offer families of products that provide the users with a choice of models so they can pick the features they need at a price they can afford. This allows our customers to maximize the features they get for their already stretched dollars. We are constantly listening to feedback from our customers and taking note. Their comments are a key part of our future products and services as well as, ultimately, our success.

We are a privately held company. We can make decisions regarding business that make sense to us, and we are not hampered by short-term profitability requirements that impact many large companies. We are free to take the business and the product lines in the directions that make sense to us, based upon the requests and wishes of our customers. Our size seems to be just right for this industry. We are small enough to be able to move fast and large enough to have the resources to respond.

24x7: *What sort of values do you impress upon your technicians?*

Roche: Our technicians are just one subgroup of our employees, and we all live by the same guidance: "Take care of each customer as if they were the only one we have." "Treat others like we would like to

be treated." "Be honest. Be fair." If this is starting to sound like something your mother taught you, it should. These are good rules for life and make pretty good guidelines for business. Of course, when you hire good people they already come with this built in (thanks, mom), so there is little need to lecture.

24x7: What sort of advances were introduced in your new NIBP-1030 simulator?

Roche: The new NIBP-1030 simulator is a prime example of an instrument providing the customer with a lot of bang for their dollar. The NIBP-1030 is a small, battery-operated device providing everything needed to test vital signs monitors. It is small and lightweight, yet it contains circuitry and software that provide output signals that match those of units at twice the price. The feature list is extensive, including NIBP, ECG, ECG waveforms, IBP, YSI-400, and YSI-700 temperature, arrhythmias, respiration SPo2, and leak detect. The NIBP-1030 even allows the user to adjust the NIBP output based on the manufacturers' differences in NIBP algorithms. It has rechargeable batteries that allow it to run 500 tests on a single charge. Also, it has flash memory and serial communications, so the user can get software upgrades directly from the Web.

24x7: What are some of the other new products the company will introduce in the coming year?

Roche: We are extremely busy in the new product development arena. However, due to competitive pressures, we'll just ask you to keep watching rather than tip our hand. What I can tell you is that we are working on several fronts. First, we will continue to expand our standard product offerings. On a second front, we have extensive programs with many major OEMs in the development of the next generation in test equipment. If you have followed the major technical leaps that have taken place over the last year in the ESU market with the introduction of our ESU2050 and ESU2300, this will give some insight into what we do and how we do it. Keep watching, and you will see a steady stream of new products.

24x7: BC Group has customers on all seven continents—Antarctica included. What can you tell us about the challenges of working with such a diverse community?

Roche: The world is an ever-changing marketplace, and the international market is on a rapid growth pattern. Years ago, there were many countries that did not put an importance on medical equipment safety. This is rapidly changing, and, as a result, biomedical test equipment is now in high demand. There are many challenges in dealing internationally. Language, laws, time displacement, terms of sale, currency values, shipping, and communication are just a few. However, like most things, there is a solution to each of these issues and a reward for those who find the solutions.

24x7: What section of the industry has seen the greatest growth this past year?

Roche: BC Group is lucky to have a wide base of customers from the entire spectrum of the test equipment market. Some of the major growth areas include ISOs—we are proud to be partners with some of the largest ISOs in the industry. We provide the test equipment, calibration, and asset tracking for their fleets of test equipment. OEMs—relationships with major OEMs have continued to expand, as evident with the introduction of the new ESU analyzer family. Our flexibility and dedication to providing the cutting edge of test equipment is opening new doors on a daily basis. International—our international business continues to expand. With a CE mark on almost the entire BC Biomedical product line, and an expanding international dealer network, we are doing well in the world marketplace.

24x7: How has BC Group adapted to this growth in regards to the products and services it offers?

Roche: We have committed a lot of resources to plant and equipment as well as people to meet our customers' needs. We continue to expand our service and product offerings. We are further expanding our R&D department to allow us to more quickly address the changes that our customers tell us are necessary. We see no end in sight for the current growth pattern and are putting into place the necessary elements to meet this challenge. We very clearly understand that our job is one of support. We are a provider of the equipment and services that allow the biomedical community to get their job done.

24x7: Your company is headquartered in St Louis. How do you interact with your local community?

Roche: BC Group has been in St Louis for many years, and most of our employees are from the region. This gives us very close ties to the community on many levels. Of course, we enjoy a healthy business in our community due to many fine hospitals and companies that we deal with. However, beyond that, our people are a microcosm of the local community. They are good employees and good citizens of the community, sharing their time and money, as you would expect of a fine group like ours. BC Group as a company endeavors to live up to the fine example set by our people.

24x7: How do you think these improve the services you offer?

Roche: Business is all about people. The better our people, the better our service. We are far from perfect, but we really try hard. If we don't meet a customer's expectations, we take that very seriously and do everything we can to fix it, learn from it, and do better the next time. We may never reach 100% satisfaction, but it won't be for lack of trying.

24x7: What are the skill sets that your company looks for when evaluating potential technicians?

Roche: Obviously, an excellent customer service outlook is critical. From there, we look for well-seasoned technicians, and we always hold a preference for those that have had prior exposure to the medical device market.

24x7: What questions do biomed and customers most frequently ask?

Roche: One very common question is, "How does BC Group differ from its competition?" Our response usually goes something like this: We are a very diverse company, and we offer over 75 different product lines for the biomedical engineering community, including our very own BC Biomedical brand. No other company in today's market can match the breadth of products and services that we offer. Also, unlike some of our competitors, we do not presume to offer only high-end and high-priced products. Our "one size does not fit all" core philosophy is realized in a wider scope of products. We can accommodate both the budget-challenged customer as well as the feature-rich enthusiast.

24x7: How do you see the company changing over the course of the next several years?

Roche: BC Group has come a long way and has a long way to go. We have introduced many new products and services, and there are many more to come. We used to have an A, B, and C list of products we wanted to develop. That list is now an A++, A+, and A list. There is no shortage of good new ideas and products that are needed in this industry. The medical equipment OEMs are currently busy designing the next generation of medical equipment using technology that does not currently

exist. We need to provide test devices that will keep up with this fast-moving technology. Many of our new test devices will be designed in cooperation with those same medical OEMs to meet the needs of this next generation of equipment and the biomedical community that will maintain them.

Providing the latest, greatest piece of test equipment is a little like climbing a mountain of sand; just when you think you are getting to the top, everything shifts and changes. We will continue to run as fast as we can to stay ahead of the market but remain flexible enough to listen to the needs of the end users and manufacturers.

24x7: How does the company support various biomedical associations?

Roche: Biomedical associations are a very valuable part of the biomedical community. BC Group's role with biomedical associations across the country is growing significantly. We have adopted a formal outreach program concerning these societies, and we have been actively engaged in providing educational-type programs at both the local meeting level as well as the regional annual symposium level. We are a corporate member of many of these societies, and we are adding new memberships to our listing on a regular basis. From California to Washington, to Maine, and to Florida, we are actively engaged in the pursuit of supporting these associations.

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