

## Currency matters

As Crane Currency - the fastest growing global currency player in the world - gets ready to open a facility in Malta, **Jo Caruana** speaks to CEO **Stephen DeFalco** about his hopes for this milestone move.



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**H**ave you ever thought about where our money comes from? If you're anything like me, it will have crossed your mind but you won't have looked into the unique industry that exists behind every banknote we hold in our hands. And it's a fascinating one at that.

One of the fastest and largest global players in the currency market is Crane Currency - a company that recently laid down roots in Malta and which will soon open a new banknote production and customer experience centre on the island.

Interestingly, the United States and Swedish arms of Crane Currency actually have an incredible history to them, dating back to 1801 and 1755 respectively. "The US government remains a key customer of ours and has been since 1879, while the Swedish facility was part of Riksbank, the

oldest central bank in the world," explains Crane's CEO, Stephen DeFalco. "We are so proud of our very rich history, as well as the substantial transitions the company has made in the last 15 years."

Before 2002, Crane's revenue was completely based in the US, along with all of its employees. Today, two-thirds of the company's revenue comes from the international market, while almost half of its employees travel on a non-US passport.

"Our growth in that time has been primarily driven by our substantial investment in the micro-optic technology that prevents counterfeiting, and our technologies are now used in 41 countries and in 105 denominations," Mr DeFalco continues. "There's no doubt that it is this anti-counterfeit technology that is the prime driver behind our growth, as it's the only



product like it on the market. 2017 has been a landmark year for us, with record revenue registered."

Crane's customers are, in essence, central banks around the world and the company can only have one customer in each country. "Each customer comes to us to design and produce their currency, so each new relationship starts with a design proposal," Mr DeFalco continues. "With that in mind, we're focused on creating an elegant banknote that's also secure and will work well in their economy."

And that's more complex than it sounds - for instance, all banknotes need to be machine-readable, must work in ATMs and must be copy-proof, interestingly, today's banknote will have around 15 layers to it and will be extremely complex in its make-up. "How complex exactly depends on the



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market the currency will be used in, as they differ substantially. After all, some will be used by some of the most sophisticated markets in the world, like the US, the UK and the eurozone, while others will be used by countries whose economies are in earlier stages of development. The fun part of the job is that you get to work on both!" Mr DeFalco says.

One of the most recent currency projects that Crane worked on was for the Swedish Central Bank. The SCB decided to replace their old banknotes because the notes' security level needed to be raised, thus helping the country to stay ahead of a potential counterfeiting problem. Both the design team at Crane Currency and other experts were involved at an early stage, ensuring that the specification of requirements would be right from the outset. As a result, a total of six new banknote designs were launched in Sweden in 2016.

And among the many aspects that they focused on when creating the notes, Crane highlights ethical business practice. "It has always been our policy to conduct our business in keeping with the highest moral, legal and ethical standards," Mr DeFalco says. "In fact, we're a founding member of the Banknote Ethics Initiative (BnEI), which focuses on the prevention of corruption and on compliance with anti-trust laws within the banknote industry."

And the company will be injecting that approach into their work in Malta, which

is already underway. "We are so excited about our new centre on the island and so looking forward to having it up and running. We found Malta to be very welcoming, with an educated and hard-working workforce, some of which already has the very specific expertise that we are looking for."

"Beyond that, Malta has a very business-friendly political environment, and we felt comfortable making a long-term investment in the country. The logistics are also positive, especially as our client-base is growing into the Middle East and Africa, so Malta perfectly positions us between Africa and the EU."

The centre itself will have two roles - primarily it will be the industry's most modern and high-tech banknote printing facility anywhere in the world, and, beyond that, it will be a customer experience centre where Crane can work collaboratively with its central bank clients to design new banknotes. "We're proud that there is nothing like it in the industry and look forward to opening the factory in the first quarter of 2018, followed by the customer centre in August."

As for Crane's future focus, Mr DeFalco stresses that the company will be concentrating on bringing further innovation to their central bank customers, while crafting technology that will make currency easy-to-use but impossible to counterfeit. "At this stage in our history, we couldn't be happier about our investment in Malta and we look forward to having the Malta team join our global team. This is an enthusiastic time for Crane," he concludes. **cc**