

Ringway spark helps drive mining industry

Electrical control systems developed by an innovative Wollongong company are helping to drive Australia's mining boom.

Ringway General Manager
Rod Brown

Ringway Control and Automation designs and manufactures specialised electronic control systems for the mining industry, and the company's products are used across Australia in applications ranging from underground conveyor belts in coal mines to massive conveyors on coal and iron ore loaders at some of the nation's largest port facilities.

Ringway's clients include the Port Waratah (Newcastle) and Gladstone Coal Loaders, the Port of Brisbane, Dampier Salt and the Argyle Diamond Mine in Western Australia and most of the Illawarra's coal mining operations. The largest conveyor its systems control is 12 km long at Claremont in Queensland's Bowen Basin coalfields.

Ringway specialises in innovative two-wire technology. Its conveyor products including emergency stop, remote isolation, starting equipment for motors that drive the belts, pre-start and warning alarms and monitoring equipment.

It also designs and manufactures mine traffic control equipment and site evacuation alarms. Its two-wire technology operates at just 7.5 volts, which means the systems are simple, safe and reliable over huge distances and in hazardous atmospheres.

In an industry where lost time can cost millions of dollars in lost production, Ringway's reputation for innovation, reliability and 24-hour servicing has made it a market leader.

"We are confident that our systems are the best in Australia," Ringway General Manager Rod Brown said. "We have installed a lot of equipment to replace rival products, but we've never had our equipment replaced by another company's.

"We've designed and built control systems that have been adopted by the industry and become the standard, and our equipment is often specified in tender documents," Mr Brown added.

One of the company's flagship products is the Ringline emergency stop system designed for very long conveyors (like the conveyor at Claremont), that require control points every 200m or so.

Ringway has a team of University of Wollongong and TAFE-trained electrical and mechatronics engineers who design and build the equipment. The company has been operating for more than 20 years and in 2009 moved into new headquarters in Unanderra with assistance from the State Government through NSW Trade & Investment. Around 27 employees work at Unanderra, while the company also has a branch office in Mackay in Queensland to service that state's mining industry.

Mr Brown says Wollongong is an ideal location for the company's headquarters because of its strong mining heritage and strong customer base provided by the region's coal mining companies, good training facilities for staff and family-oriented lifestyle.

"Mining is a very specific industry, and we like to develop our own people," Mr Brown said. "We have very good, loyal employees who like living in the area and working for us. The local coal industry is very strong, and we are well supported by the local wholesalers and engineering firms."

Mr Brown chairs i3net – the network of Illawarra manufacturing companies that work together to promote the region's manufacturing capabilities. "I really enjoy the fact that i3net gives local business people the chance to work together and build rapport in a non-competitive environment," he said. "We can confidentially go to member companies and get advice on areas outside our expertise, and know we will be charged an honest and fair price. It also gives us the opportunity to share costs for promotions at events like National Manufacturing Week, by going there as a group to promote the region."



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