



The Italian inverter manufacturer Layer Electronics is focusing on countries with insufficient power supply infrastructure – such as Kenya.

Il produttore italiano di inverter Layer Electronics si concentra su paesi nei quali l'energia elettrica non è ancora sviluppata in modo ottimale, come ad esempio il Kenia.

followed by Germany with 17 %," says Averaldo Farri, Vice President of Sales EMEA (Europe, Middle East, Africa). The rest of the EMEA region represented 31 % of the total revenue, Asia Pacific 9 % and North America 15 %. It is clear from these figures that the downturn in Italy and Germany has hit Power-One hard. As sales in Europe declined by 32 %, the company has now hit the brakes. "We had to adjust our production to the demand situation," says Farri, "and, in turn, cut our workforce by 3 %." The main reason for the lay-offs was the sharp decline in demand in Italy, but also in Germany, says the company.

According to the PV inverter specialist, the conditions are not going to improve in Europe – quite on the contrary. Understandably, the Italian inverter manufacturer is now trying to make headway on foreign markets. According to Farri, the company is focusing especially on the North American and the Chinese market where it has already established production sites. Power-One recently took its business in China to the next level by signing a strategic alliance contract with the China-based EPC contractor Phono Solar.

Focus on foreign markets

But also other Italian companies are getting ready for the international stage. Santerno, an inverter manufacturer based in Imola, recently attracted a lot of attention with its activities on the US market. Its competitor Layer Electronics, based in Trapani, follows a similar strategy by trying to strengthen its foothold internationally. "Conto Energia V has virtually put a freeze on the Italian market. The tariffs were cut too sharply and coupled with high levels of bureaucracy," says Antonino Culcasi of Layer Electronics. His company has built up a production capacity of 30 MW, but the management expects its inverters sales to arrive at only 10 MW in 2013. "We are therefore increasingly focusing on markets outside of Italy, particularly on those with insufficient power supply such as Kenya or the Democratic Republic of Congo, where we have already implemented our first projects."

Only very few specialists have not yet felt the effects of the general downturn on the Italian market. Valenia, a manufacturer of solar inverters based in

Power-One. Il 31% del giro d'affari è stato realizzato nelle rimanenti regioni dell'EMEA, il 9% nell'area asiatica-pacifica e il 15% in Nord America. Queste percentuali rivelano quanto la recessione colpisca Power-One in Italia e in Germania. Le vendite in Europa si sono ridotte del 32%, l'impresa ha già tratto le conseguenze del caso. "Il risultato è stato che abbiamo dovuto adeguare la nostra produzione alla domanda", dice Farri. "E, conseguentemente, siamo stati costretti a ridurre il numero dei nostri dipendenti del 3%." La causa principale è riconducibile al forte calo della domanda in Italia, ma anche in Germania.

Un miglioramento della situazione europea non è atteso, piuttosto il contrario. Logicamente il produttore di inverter sta rafforzando le sue attività in altri mercati. Si punta principalmente al mercato nordamericano e cinese dove l'impresa dispone già di siti produttivi. Ora in Cina Power-One ha tentato un altro passo: una cooperazione con l'EPC-Contractor Phono Solar.

Concentrazione sull'attività estera

Anche altre imprese italiane si rivolgono con più determinazione ad altri mercati: ad esempio il produttore di inverter Santerno di Imola si fa notare per il business realizzato negli USA. Per il concorrente Layer Electronics con sede a Trapani le cose sembrano simili, anche quest'impresa cerca la propria fortuna operando con l'estero. "Il V Conto Energia ha bloccato il mercato italiano nel vero senso della parola. Le tariffe incentivanti sono state tagliate troppo radicalmente e la burocrazia assume dimensioni non arginabili", rivela Antonino Culcasi di Layer Electronics. L'impresa vanta una capacità produttiva di 30 MW, ma i responsabili prospettano per il 2013 di vendere inverter per una potenza complessiva di 10 MW. "Ora ci concentriamo più decisamente sui mercati esteri. In questi casi puntiamo soprattutto su paesi nei quali l'energia elettrica non è ancora sviluppata in modo ottimale, come ad esempio in Kenia o nella Repubblica Democratica del Congo, dove abbiamo già realizzato dei progetti."

Solo per pochissime imprese, ben orientate, la difficile situazione del mercato italiano ha poche conseguenze negative. Il produttore vicentino di inverter Valenia è una di queste aziende. Al momento sono i piccoli progetti privati a dominare il mercato italiano. E Valenia si è specializzata proprio su questo segmento di mercato.

"Così succede che persino in tempi duri come questi riusciamo ancora ad aumentare un po' il nostro giro d'affari", dice Silvia Spillere, l'addetta stampa di Valenia. È vantaggioso per la sua azienda che attualmente si realizzino quasi esclusivamente piccoli impianti su tetto destinati ai privati. Questo trend sarebbe favorito anche dal comportamento delle banche, "che considerano al momento con scetticismo i progetti fotovoltaici più grandi, tanto da essere quasi impossibile realizzarli. Per gli impianti privati su tetto la cosa è diversa perché vengono ancora finanziati dagli istituti di credito", dice Spillere. Inoltre, si ven-

Complete solutions for peace of mind

Photon Energy Group offers a broad scale of services covering the entire lifespan of a PV plant – from project development and construction to grid connection and subsequently O&M. One of Photon Energy's specialities are PV hybrid solutions, explains CEO Georg Hotar.



Georg Hotar, CEO of Photon Energy Group

Mr. Hotar, what is special about Photon Energy?

Georg Hotar: The scale of services! Because we own a large portfolio of power plants ourselves we know exactly, which services other owners require and which concerns we can help them with. We follow a low-risk-strategy and want to focus more on PV projects which are independent of state subsidies. This includes mainly off-grid solutions and grid-parity projects developed by our "Photon Energy Solutions" unit. In general we aim to offer our customers complete solutions for peace of mind.

Which services and markets are you focused on?

Hotar: Our group can rely on six strong divisions: project financing, implementation, technical service, monitoring. Owners of power plants will find our services regarding revenue enhancement interesting. Our O&M division now also specialises on services for inverters of the defunct company Satcon. As far as markets are concerned we are mainly interested in Australia, Turkey and North America, where solar power is in many regions already the cheapest form of energy.

Hybrid-systems are a relatively new market for photovoltaics. What are the applications and their strengths?

Hotar: Their advantage is being able to add a PV installation to existing forms of energy production. For this you always need to find an individual solution aimed at saving the customer money, which ultimately is what this is about. Depending on what the current primary or secondary energy sources are you can either construct an entirely new system or add new components to an existing system. The strength of PV hybrid solutions is the wide range of possibilities. We want to be very close to the customer with our Photon Energy Solutions and offer the possibility of a Power Purchase Agreement, by which we sell electricity directly to the customer, who does not have to worry about initial investment costs.

Do you think diesel-hybrid systems could be used for grid-stabilisation?

Hotar: Of course. You would use solar power during the day, as inverters have the fastest reaction time. During the night you could use stored energy, as diesel generators have a very slow reaction time. Depending on the size it can take several seconds or even minutes before a diesel generator produces the electricity needed.

How do you convince customers with your solutions?

Hotar: The systems are being offered to customers for whom it makes financial sense to use alternative forms of energy. If a company in the Australian outback for example has to transport diesel over long distances and at astronomical costs and is also dependent on the volatile price of oil and then has to pay carbon tax, then it simply cannot afford to be prejudiced against solar energy.

What is currently dominant: PV as a primary or secondary source of energy?

Hotar: That is hard to say, because it depends very much on storage. Companies which operate primarily during the day can use PV as a primary source, while companies operating 24/7 need a differently calculated mix. There are also regional differences. To be able to calculate the right mix you need to take into consideration the price of energy, capital costs and subsidies for renewable energies. Good irradiation helps, but all in all it is a secondary factor.

Which services does Photon Energy offer in a hybrid project?

Hotar: We accompany the project from start to finish. Potential customers contact us with information regarding their companies, geographical data, current energy consumption, etc. We then do the necessary calculations. After that we can offer help during project financing, chose the right components, build the system and then take over monitoring and O&M.

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