Kilkern & Vac UK's massive investment in Vac Ex technology leads to profitable expansion & safer UK civil engineering sites.

Wednesday 17 February, 2021

2020 was an exciting year at civil engineering specialist Kilkern, with both turnover and profits rising despite the problems caused by the coronavirus. Turnover rose from £8.7 million in 2019 to £10.9 million in 2020, with net profit rising from £350,000 in 2019 to £775,000 in 2020.

Neil Gallagher, Kilkern's Chief Accountant, said: "The business plan did take a knock during the initial lockdown when sites closed as construction companies were unsure whether they should be working or not, but thankfully the government's commitment to keeping the infrastructure sector working meant that Kilkern and Vac UK had a good year despite all the obstacles the pandemic put in their way.

"The toughest part of the year was during the first lockdown back in March 2020. No one in the industry knew what to expect. Thankfully the government stepped forward to support the sector. We were lucky that although some of our work was put on stop, work on critical infrastructure was allowed to continue.

"Our worst sector, during this period, was the work we do for the national housebuilders as most of them stopped completely so we put an extra focus into business development to make sure we got more work in the areas that were still working such as utilities and rail."

Kilkern, which started in 2010, now has three specialist divisions: vacuum excavator hire (Vac UK), civils contracting and specialist labour.

Vac UK invests heavily in the latest suction excavator technology to help reduce cable strikes across the industry and meet their clients' ever-increasing demands for safe, innovative, cost-effective and environmentally friendly solutions.

Vac UK Kilkern's vacuum excavator arm has gone from strength to strength.

Vac UK has taken delivery of a new vacuum excavator every month for the last two years to ensure their clients continue to enjoy access to the UK's best fleet.

For 2021, Vac UK has ordered an additional 15 vacuum excavators, taking the total investment to £17.5 million and from 20 to 35 units. Vac UK has the most modern, highest-spec vacuum excavator fleet in the UK.

Vac UK's hire arm is the trusted delivery partner to the UK's major contractors and stocks vacuum extractors from all the leading manufacturers to ensure they always have the best vacuum excavators and drivers to suit their clients' needs.

Patrick Curran, managing director of Kilkern, was inspired to set up Vac UK in 2017 after witnessing some tragic accidents where civil engineering operatives had been badly injured in utility strikes. In one incident, on a project with Crossrail in central London, a young worker had hit an electric cable, which caused an explosion so large and loud that the operative was lucky to survive and had to be airlifted to hospital by helicopter.

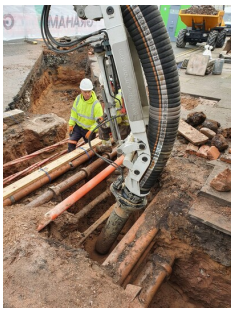
At the time, Patrick conducted some research on the subject and found out more about the potential benefits of vacuum excavators. He was surprised—when he found out how much safer they were in digging around live utilities—that they were not more widely used in the industry.

A report by the utility strike avoidance group, which publishes its findings every year, showed that in the five years up until 2017, the incidence of electrical strikes had risen 668 per cent. This was despite all the extra investment the industry had put into health and safety initiatives for safe digging.

A recent report in the Construction Enquirer has shown that cable strikes have jumped again by 20 per cent in the last year, during the lockdown.

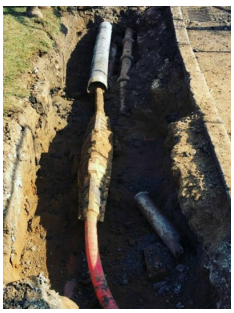
The biggest risk in terms of hitting electric cables is causing an injury or death to a worker. Every year in

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the UK there are approximately 12 deaths, 70 life-changing injuries and 600 serious injuries as a result of workers striking utilities.



As well as being a danger to workers, hitting cables also poses a financial and reputational risk to contractors. The average cost of a utility strike is £100,000, but this figure can run into millions.

Many public utilities and more safety-conscious clients are now moving towards banning the use of hand tools for digging around live utilities, especially on footpaths and on sites congested with live utilities.



The majority of utility strikes occur with operatives using hand tools, even when pre-excavation scans have been carried out.

Michael Brown, one of Vac UK's most experienced vacuum excavator operatives, said: "Looking at these pictures you wouldn't have expected someone to have laid the electric cables so close to the surface of the ground. You wouldn't have expected the cables to be left exposed and you wouldn't expect a worker to be asked to dig around these cables rather than hire a vac ex to safely suck up the earth from around the cables. You wouldn't but people are unfortunately still doing all these things as they're putting cost before safety and in doing so endangering lives.



"No one was meant to have laid the cables in this fashion and no utility survey would accurately show what a complete mess it is under the pavement," Michael continued. "Even so, every time we are shocked to find what lies underneath and dread to think what would happen if someone tried to dig it up without a vac ex."



Utility strike avoidance group statistics on service strikes by equipment used

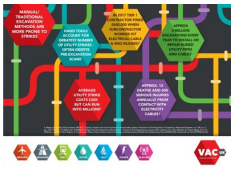
Vac UK's hire arm stocks vacuum excavators from RSP and MTS in Germany and Longo in Italy



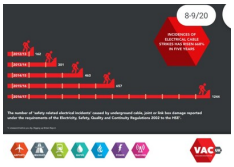
New vac ex arrives every month from the manufacturer to Vac UK

Vac UK takes delivery of a brand new machine from the manufacturer each month. This steady investment enables the firm to ensure controlled growth which can be sustained far into the future.

A vacuum excavator is an expensive piece of equipment, costing between £370,000 and £700,000 depending on the specification. Anna Melia, Vac UK's transport manager, says that owing to the cost of the machines and the nature of the safety-critical work they are engaged in, it is important to recruit only the best operators and to ensure that they are all properly trained and inducted.



Vac UK puts its operators through an in-house training programme and also through the training from the manufacturer to ensure each operator is fully conversant with the Vac UK quality and safety standards and also knows how to operate the vehicle within the manufacturer's safe operating limits.



Vac UK now has a team of 20 vacuum excavator operators, with new drivers being inducted every month.

Continued investment in people, plant and systems



Vac UK works in highly regulated sectors and is constantly adding to its suite of safety and quality accreditations.

Transport manager Anna Melia highlights that Vac UK is committed to having the highest standards of compliance in the vacuum excavator sector. Owing to Vac UK's involvement in many of the UK's largest and most high profile projects, including HS2, we need to prove to our clients that we are continually improving our standards. As part of this drive, Vac UK has achieved the FOR's Silver accreditation and is now working towards FOR's Gold.



Vac UK now offers vacuum excavators for sale as well as hire

Vac UK has now also holds a distribution licence for the Longo Rhino vac ex for the UK, Ireland, USA and Canada and is now offering vacuum excavators for sale as well as hire.

Longo is a multigenerational family business with 50 years' history and experience. It is a world market leader in the production of industrial vehicles for the water, highways, airports, oil & gas, civil engineering and infrastructure sectors. Longo specialises in equipment using vacuum and high-pressure technology for drainage sewerage systems, safe utility exposure and hazardous waste.

Related Sectors:

Vac UK chooses to partner with Longo for two key reasons. Firstly, because we want to find the best vacuum excavators and we believe that the Longo Rhino vac ex is the best vacuum excavator on the market, and secondly, because of Longo's commitment to innovation.

Vac UK has many new innovations in the pipeline in collaboration with Longo which we plan to bring to the market to help improve the vac ex's safety, environmental and operational performance.

Vac UK and Longo partner together in new vac ex innovation drive

In 2021, Vac UK is bringing a number of new products to the market, including a vacuum excavator with Atex capability which can be operated safely within controlled combustion zones.

Additional innovations include a vacuum excavator cyclone attachment which can safely suction asbestos and other hazardous dust, and a vacuum excavator with a road sweeper so powerful it is used to clean Formula One race tracks.

Vac UK Longo Rhino vac ex roadsweeper attachment cleaning the Ferrari race track in Italy

Longo Rhino vacuum excavator offers new standards in environmental efficiency

Reducing emissions from road transport remains a significant challenge as the UK looks to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

The Longo Rhino's multifunctionality means it can take on more jobs that normally require more lorries, and therefore more fuel and pollution.

In addition to using modern and efficient engines, the Rhino utilises a fully flexible stepless system for controlling the air flow rate from the high-performance turbines. This ensures the right amount of suction can be used on any given task, which is more efficient at reducing carbon emissions as the turbine control system ensures that fuel is only used at high turbine speeds when the machine is actually operating under suction.

Other vacuum excavators operate at high turbine speed even when the machine is idle, owing to a binary on/off switch configuration. This means the Longo Rhino has a greater fuel efficiency, which minimises the carbon dioxide emissions during operation.

Longo Rhino vacuum excavator on Scania chassis

Kilkern Civils and Kilkern Labour Hire also grow turnover and profits during 2020

Kilkern Civils continues to build its reputation as a highways and civils specialist subcontractor in the North West and has successfully completed several multimillion-pound contracts.

Chris Wright joined in December 2020 as its civil engineering director. Chris was recently managing director of Harry Fairclough Civil Engineering and lives locally to Kilkern's head office in Manchester. Chris has 29 years of experience working in the industry, after graduating in civil engineering from Newcastle University, including working as a senior operations manager at J Murphy and Sons and a contacts manager at Civils subcontractor GPL.

Wright said: "I'm looking forward to developing Kilkern Civils' growing reputation as a highways and civil engineering subcontract specialist within the North and North West of England. The team at Kilkern take pride in developing a culture of prioritising our clients' requirements when planning and executing projects whilst maintaining an exemplary health, safety and environmental track record with a reputation for innovation."

Kilkern's Specialist Labour Hire also grew considerably and secured a number of significant contract wins across HS2, highway, rail and civil engineering.

Kilkern and Vac UK have exciting plans for the year ahead and forecast a continued increase in turnover to £20 million for 2021.

Vac UK launches in USA as Vac US

Construction & Property :: Manufacturing, Engineering & Energy :: Transport & Logistics ::

Related Keywords:

Vacuum Excavator :: Vac Ex :: Kilkern :: Vac Uk :: Vac Ex Hire :: Hire A Vac Ex :: Suction Excavator Hire :: Hire A Suction Excavator :: Vacuum Excavation UK ::

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Vac US has been incorporated by Kilkern in Delaware, with the initial US base in New York covering the Northeast Corridor from Boston to Washington DC.

Vac US will be offering vac ex sales as well as hire and will be supplying the Longo Rhino vacuum excavator in the USA.

Vac US will be exhibiting the Longo Rhino vac ex in trade shows in America in 2022, including the WWET Water & Environmental Expo in Indianapolis and the Utility Expo in Louisville Kentucky.

Vac UK are planning to spend 2021 in collaboration with Longo, designing and manufacturing the vacuum excavator for the US market so that when it arrives in 2022 it will set a new standard of safety, environmental and operational performance.

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