

view from the top

Making the Right Connections

Assunta Fratocchi, Managing Director, Link

by Fred Goodman

Assunta Fratocchi, managing director and co-owner of Link, actually got her start in the lighting industry. In the early 1980s, Italy was a world leader in the production of lighting equipment, particularly in the vicinity of Rome. "There were a number of local companies focused on supplying luminaires to the cinema and television market," says Fratocchi. She began her career with Quartzcolor Laniro, one of the largest lighting manufacturers in the world.

Fratocchi had the fortune of reporting directly to Giovanni Laniro, which significantly influenced her, both personally and professionally. "Mr. Laniro had great vision for the future, but never forgot that his employees were the reason for the company's success," Fratocchi notes. "To me, he was the perfect balance between a family man and a business man." Ultimately, Fratocchi met her husband-to-be, Fulvio Cotogni, and they both left Quartzcolor shortly after it was sold to Strand.

In 1985, Assunta and Fulvio founded ARRI Italia and co-managed the company for the next seven years. In the meantime, a touring sound engineer, Marco Piromalli, was tired of struggling with unreliable and unmanageable cabling solutions. Realizing that the reliability of his portable audio system was 100 percent dependent on the cable and connectors that held it together, he had a vision of starting a company that was dedicated to solving connectivity solutions for touring and broadcast. Piromalli founded Link with one other partner in 1987.

Fratocchi left ARRI Italia in 1992 to have her son, Valerio. For the next six years she was a "stay-at-home mom," living in Germany and England while following Fulvio's career. Through industry connections, Fratocchi got to know Piromalli and after deciding to return to the workforce, was offered a director role at Link. "Over the next three years, there were some ownership changes that resulted in an opportunity to become a shareholder," continues Fratocchi. "Before I knew what was happening, I was a co-owner of an audio cabling company. Fortunately, my lighting friends still talk to me, and are willing to buy our connectors."



Initially, Link's focus was to produce mil-spec connectors, and the LK brand was introduced. "LK Connectors are now pretty well established in both audio and lighting," Fratocchi points out. In the beginning, Link was subcontracting some of the manufacturing. "A few years ago," she continues, "we decided to create a separate LK factory in Rome, because it gave us more control over the entire process." Once Link had established the connector line, the company quickly moved on to producing industry-specific cables that were branded, Eurocable.

Fratocchi continues, "With connectors adapted from the military, and a new line of cables designed just for production engineers, we found ourselves in a unique position to start partnering with other manufacturers to establish standards for audio connectivity in Italy and across Europe." Expanding its roots in the entertainment industry, it was also a natural progression for Link to introduce cables and connectors designed to solve the needs of lighting and broadcast professionals.

More than 20 years later, Link has developed into a multinational organization with offices and representation in most

parts of or the world. Although Europe still accounts for a large part of the global turnover, Link's U.S. operation has been gaining market share since opening the doors outside of Orlando, FL in 2004.

"Between the LK Connector factory and the main office in Rome, Link has 31 direct employees," comments Fratocchi. "Except for the U.S., we typically work with exclusive distributors outside of Italy to sell our products to the other countries. In the States, it is different because we are working primarily with Bosch and Harman Group reps in the major territories." Link has eight employees based at the U.S. office in Altamonte Springs, FL.

"Since we opened the office in Florida, Marco and I have spent a lot of time on airplanes," Fratocchi says. "Even though we hire people from our industry, there is still a lot for us to teach about our culture and products. Owning fine Italian cable is like owning a Ferrari. We need to show people how passionate we are about these things!"

Fratocchi explains, "In the last 10 years, we have seen many new protocols and more complexity in how audio, video and lighting devices communicate. Since we have complete control over the designs of

both the cable and connectors, Link is well positioned to transport the mixture of analog, digital and power signals now typical of many new systems. Our engineers have designed a number of hybrid cables and connectors for manufacturers and production companies who appreciate the need for easy handling and reliability in the field."

Fratocchi adds, "Link just introduced a hybrid snake system we call DGLink. This system can handle all types of signals and protocols all at once with one connection. This makes setting up a complex touring rig a lot easier."

When asked about some of the challenges, Fratocchi says, "Of course, we are always watching costs of currencies, copper and transportation. Sometimes it is like being on a ride at Disney World!"

What does the future hold for Link? Fratocchi has a few interesting conclusions: "For now, systems seem to be getting more complex. We receive many more calls at the Link office asking about the best way to connect 'this console' to 'that line array' powered by 'those amplifiers.' Fortunately, we have already engineered many of the solutions. If the request is for something we don't already have, Link has designed custom cables and connector combinations for tours that need to go out in less than eight weeks from [time of contact]. I'm pretty sure that as long as we maintain our passion for the industry, and keep the best people providing innovative products, there will always be a place for Link in the entertainment business."

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