

Leading European Glass Lifting Machine Manufacturer Smartlift, now Expanding its efforts in the United States



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CEOCFO: *Mr. Nielsen, would you give us a little background about SmartLift?*

Mr. Nielsen:

Smartlift is a company that manufactures glass lifting machines. Smart lift machines are made for installation of glass, glazing, granite countertops and all kind of building materials with a smooth surface.

Smartlift was established in 2007, and has now been fourteen years in business. The production company is out of Denmark in Scandinavia where the very high health and safety regulations move this forward, this way these machines got their beginning ground.

Smartlift US headquarter is placed in Nebraska where we have the sales and service placed. In addition, we have sales reps throughout the states.

Smartlift also has an entity in Germany and Sweden. We have distributors in most of the world, and we are present in Australia, all of Europe, Singapore and New Zealand.

CEOCFO: *Why was now the time for the US expansion?*

Mr. Nielsen:

We actually have a very good distributor in the United States over the past 3-4 years, so we have been in this market for quite a while. Smartlift US is still working closely with them and they are very good and loyal distributor and we help each other.

Smart lift wanted to be closer to our customers, to provide the best service we can, that it why is was important that the factory, the manufacturer Smart Lift came to the United States and began to setup our sales and service systems here as well.

Smartlift major markets are glazing companies and rental companies, so service and backup is essential to these companies.

If you have a lifting machine that breaks down on a site, it is urgent to get it fixed. Even getting advice about how to use the machines and what to do is essential.

USA is a huge market, and although we have been in the US for the past three years, we felt it was time to be here ourselves.

CEOCFO: *What makes a good lifting machine? What have you learned over the years? What are some of the challenges?*

Mr. Nielsen:

No doubt that Smartlift is by far the largest brand in the world for companies using these small glazing robots.

Our span of variety goes from 400- to 2200 lbs. of lifting capacity.
Smartlift uses high-end components to ensure a very high reliability of the machines.

Another thing Smartlift is very dedicated about is the precision in our machines. We have to be able to install within 64th of an inch as we are talking about glass, so there is not a lot of wiggle room.

If you think you can push or move glass by force, you are basically going to break it. The accuracy of our machines is really good. That is one of the points where I believe Smartlift stand out in the market - that you can install glass with our machines; not just lift it but install it.

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Flemming S. Nielsen**

What is also important is that the machines are easy to operate. We say the Smartlift machines are plug-and-play machines.

Smartlift made some videos showing how to operate the machines, and we perform training when we deliver the machines.

CEOCFO: *Do they understand the difference?*

Mr. Nielsen:

Not always. If we were talking about cost, you could say Smartlift is a high-end brand and this other brand is not.

Smartlift is a niche product and the product type in general is not known enough throughout the glazing industry in the United States.

We do have competitors who do make ok machines and some making the cheapest possible, meaning the difference between the machines is something we need to explain all the time.

CEOCFO: *What can you say to potential customers to give them confidence that what you have at Smart Lift is better?*

Mr. Nielsen:

The Smartlift sales representative in this industry actually visits and make meetings with our customers and do demonstrations onsite.

When we get out there to our customers and show them the machines onsite - the Smartlift actually proves itself.

Helping a glazing company to solve a problem, or just to show them how we can do this installation, without risking health and safety, that is a great eye opener for this particular industry.

CEOCFO: *Are people looking at Smartlift to replace something they have or is it typically an addition to what they are doing now?*

Mr. Nielsen:

It is usually a new purchase. Sometimes we are replacing a few old-fashioned machines but that is rare.

I think the industry is starting to recognize the need for these machines, as there are simply not enough people to do the jobs anymore. Furthermore, the health risk by doing installation manually is too high.

Increasing size on glass, double-glazing and even triple-glazing have a huge impact on the weight, meaning that even a regular piece of glass suddenly triples in weight.

A while ago two guys could do the job, it was not a big deal and not that heavy. Now the work is much bigger and heavier and the companies need more labor...but the labor is not there, so what do you do? You have to do something. That is the challenge.

The machines are basically cheap to buy and own, especially compared to adding 2-3 persons on the jobsite.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about the different pieces of equipment?*

Mr. Nielsen:

Smartlift has the largest range of machines on the market. We build specifically indoor models or specifically outdoor models.

You could say the smaller outdoor models are a hybrid. They can go indoor because we make them so small width wise that you can still walk through a door with them.

We always look at what capacity our customers' needs and what kind of weight they have to lift. It is important that we ask our customers the right questions:

Do you need to reach out a lot?

Do you need to go high?

Do you need to go inside a shop and move glass around?

Some might need a smaller machine because there is not that much space, then they need an indoor small machine where 300 lbs. capacity is more than enough.

If they need to install curtain wall or unit sized panels, then they may need the big outdoor SL 608 High Lifter or SL 1008.

We always look into what kind of problem our customers need to be solved, and then we give our best guidance of what will work. This way the customer can always be safe.

CEOCFO: *Where do you manufacture and what type of inventory do you need to maintain?*

Mr. Nielsen:

The machines are right now produced in Denmark, but we are working on setting up an assembly in Nebraska, our plan is to be up and running beginning of 2023.

I try to maintain about forty machines here in the US at all times.

If we have a look at spare parts I believe we have almost everything on the shelf and if we do not, it doesn't take long

to ship it from factory. Smart lift also sees the pressure on getting parts from our suppliers, but we seem to be managing this issue quite well.

CEOCFO: *How do you demo to your customers across the US?*

Mr. Nielsen:

Smart lift has sales representative Joe Silva in the New York and New Jersey area.

We got sales representative Tony Wages in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.

We have sales representative Mike Debotte covering Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Arkansas.

Personally, I cover Nebraska and all the mountain states as well.

We have a good partner in southern California and we have a very good distributor in Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

Finally, we have a very good dealer in Chicago, so we are pretty well covered.

CEOCFO: *It is really boots on the ground!*

Mr. Nielsen:

It is boots on the ground. We always call ourselves "old vacuum cleaner sales guys" because that is what we do.

It is of course a different kind of business. We understand that we need to show people that Smart lift actually works, and that Smartlift can be the best new employee the customers can have.

Now we want to enter the market in the United States, and it is basically the same glass, the same type of installations as in Europe, and the companies have the same challenges. There is not big difference to that. Now we just need to get out there and put out the word.

CEOCFO: *How is business?*

Mr. Nielsen:

Business is good. The glazing business is good. Construction is basically good.

CEOCFO: *Is there any pushback from the actual workers in that there are less people needed for the job or are they happy for the help?*

Mr. Nielsen:

I think the industry is lacking so much labor that everybody can see this is "Smart". I have been working with Smart lift for about ten years now, and in the early days it was "oh we can still do this by hand".

Yes 10 years ago you could still do this by hand because it was single-layer and not that heavy. Smartlift believe that everybody has a limit in how much they can lift and how many times they can do it in a day.

Everybody wants to go home to the family at night and just be a human being - I truly believe that is the demand for jobs today.

I know a lot of young people are opting out of this industry simply because they look at the older guys who have been doing this for years by hand, and decide they do not want to wear themselves out.

There is a thing about health and safety, that the industry has to look into now, companies cannot just do it as they did it fifty years ago.

CEOCFO: *How does the automation work and how Smart Lift, a robotic machine, able to do something that is so precise?*

Mr. Nielsen:

Smartlift does not use a lot of hydraulics, we only use hydraulics in our very big machines in order to maximize the lifting capacity.

Most Smartlift models uses electric actuators, which means there is a little step engine that will move it a small step at a time.

There are a lot of other things, such as the right wheels, the right frame and the knowledge of how to put the correct parts together that makes the Smartlift different.

Behind the models we have on the market now are years of in-depth and professional engineering and installation work. Our team always works to ensure that our products are user friendly and innovative. At the same time, all models undergo a thorough quality control before leaving our factory.

Another thing why Smartlift machines are good, is actually they are not too fast.

There are a lot of companies that say they want to do this fast, but the problem with glazing is, if you do it too fast, you are probably going to break something, or you are not in control of what you do.

The idea of going fast is probably out of the crane business, where you have to lift something up fast or lowering it fast. That is not what we do.... we install glass. Therefore, you must "hurry-up slowly".

At the end of the day the glazing companies are probably installing twice as much as if they were too fast.

I think that this is what it is about, understanding the industry, and what it is all about.