

Beyond extrusion: Estral builds a comprehensive service with support from its paint supplier

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Since 1974, Estral has progressively expanded its expertise, processes, and services, evolving from a company specialising in extrusion into a partner capable of managing aluminium profiles across most of the supply chain. The implementation of powder coating operations marked the latest step in this vertical integration strategy, with supplier selection also playing a strategic role: Estral's partnership with TIGER Coatings enables it to broaden its product range, address challenges, and better meet customer needs.



“Moving towards meeting almost all of our customers' requests and requirements for the production and finishing of aluminium profiles seemed to us to be the most natural path of development for our company, which has been applying its expertise to this industry for the past fifty years.” These words, spoken by Giancarlo Alberti, the managing director of Estral, during his interview with **ipcm®**, describe a growth trajectory common to an ever-increasing number of manufacturing companies today: progressively expanding their expertise and services to meet customer needs in a more comprehensive manner. Anticipating, embracing, understanding, internalising, and meeting the needs of their target markets are values embedded in the DNA of all contract businesses: as they do not have a product of their own, they help other companies complete, finish, enhance, and promote theirs. After all, the line between manufacturer and service provider is gradually blurring.

Estral vertical powder coating line for profiles up to 7.5 mt was designed by Euroimpianti (Valeggio sul Mincio, Verona, Italy).

On the one hand, industrial companies are now expected to offer not just products but also solutions, customisation, refinement, and after-sales support. On the other hand, contractors and service providers have gradually expanded their scope of activity, investing in technology, expertise, and processes to play an increasingly significant role in the creation of end products.

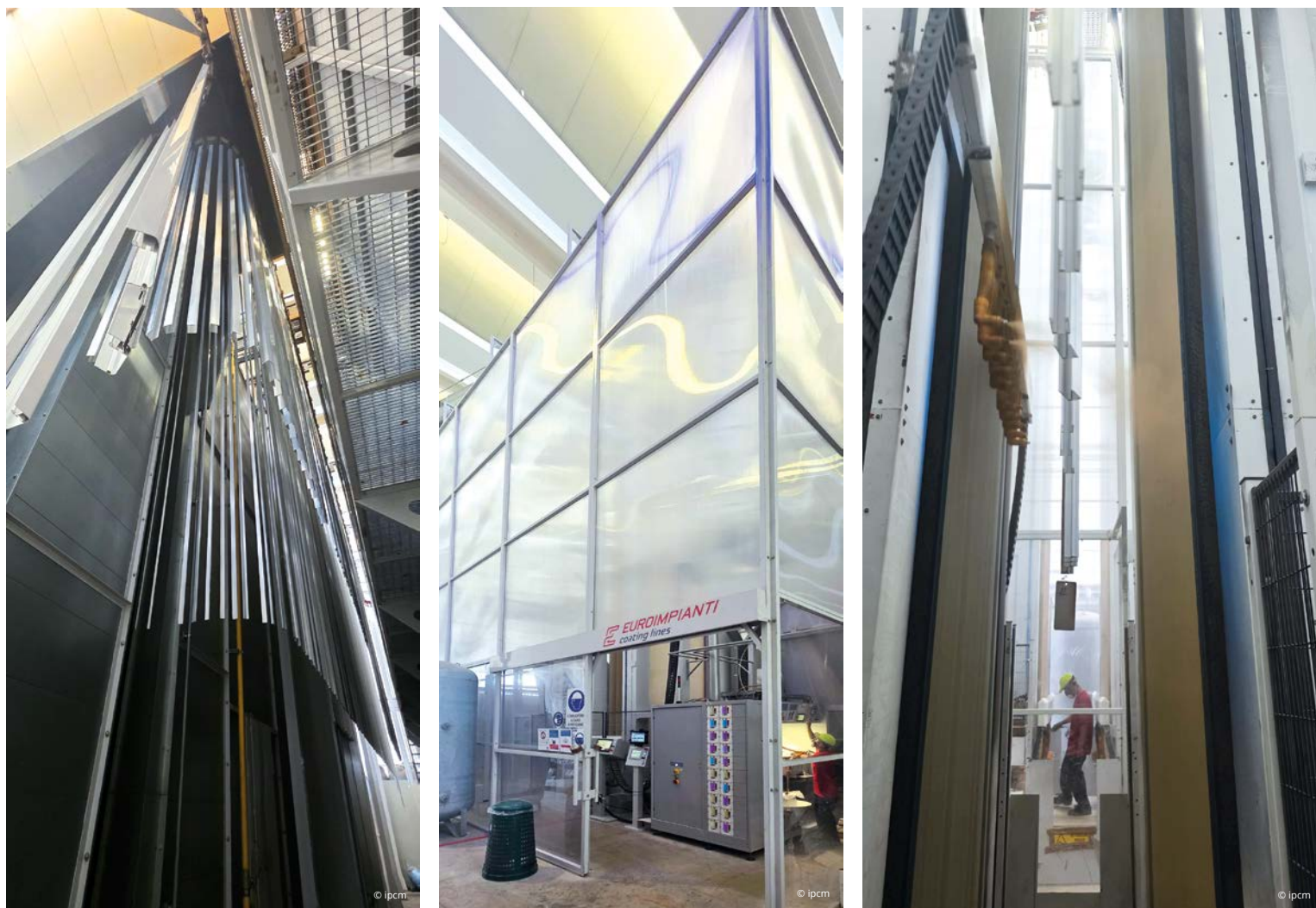
That is where the right choice of suppliers and partners becomes strategically important. To guarantee flawless service, it is essential to build a supply chain of reliable providers selected not only for the quality of their products but also for their ability to share standards, values, and corporate vision. As the distinction between product and service blurs, so does the separation between suppliers and partners.

Estral is a concrete example of this evolution: its fifty-year history reflects the gradual expansion of its expertise and the vertical integration of its

production processes, enabling it to offer increasingly comprehensive services. The implementation of powder coating operations, together with the establishment of solid partnerships with coating producers, was a further statement of intent to maintain a focus on quality and delivery times, and to continue growing from a technical perspective. The collaboration with TIGER Coatings is a concrete example of this.

Specialising in shaping aluminium

Estral, an acronym for Estrusione Alluminio (meaning 'aluminium extrusion'), was founded in 1974 in Manerbio, within one of Italy's most prolific industrial districts: an area in the Lombardy region that stretches between the provinces of Bergamo and Brescia and is home to numerous companies specialising in the extrusion, die-casting, machining, and finishing of aluminium for architectural and industrial applications.



From left to right: Entrance and exit of the profiles from the drying and curing ovens; The coating booths are housed in a pressurised clean room; Application of TIGER Coatings powders in glossy white, Estral's flagship colour.

Over fifty years in business, the company has expanded its original core activities, extrusion and subsequent machining operations, by integrating an in-house foundry, Deral SpA, adjacent to its original plant, which manufactures billets for extrusion by collecting, sorting, and smelting scrap, with a production capacity of 70,000 tonnes per year; a retail distribution centre, Alu-Brixia Srl, which delivers 5,000 tonnes per year of profiles on a just-in-time basis; and, five years ago, a new powder coating department certified to Qualicoat Seaside standards. Rather than mere scale expansion, this reflects a clear strategy of vertical integration, aimed at extending control over the supply chain and, above all, enhancing the company's ability to meet customer needs through an integrated offering. "Since 1974, we have been working alongside our customers to design, develop, and manufacture custom extruded

aluminium alloy profiles. We operate five extrusion presses with an annual production capacity of 40,000 tonnes of profiles, ranging from small to large sizes. We carry out all types of machining operations, collaborating with our customers to bring their ideas, designs, and innovative products to life. We also handle thermal break assembly, film lamination, screen printing, heat-shrink packaging, pre-assembly, and packaging with bespoke kits tailored to each requirement," says Giancarlo Alberti, CEO of Estral. "The latest process we have introduced is powder coating. The goal was to manage the entire aluminium production chain and thus provide a comprehensive service, including ensuring the availability of the raw material right from the start thanks to our foundry. This is particularly valuable today, in light of the global situation characterised by significant uncertainty regarding procurement."



One of the two Optispeeder powder centres WITH Smart-In-Line technology supplied by Gema Europe (Trezano sul Naviglio, Milan, Italy).



The powder coating application booths are equipped with the Polifluid system by Eurosider (Grosseto, Italy) which controls temperature and humidity of compressed air.



"Estral is a company with a strong focus on quality – a word that recurs countless times in all our day-to-day communications, both internally and externally – and is totally dedicated to serving its customers. We do not have our own range of branded products: we manufacture exclusively to the specifications of our customers, which come from a wide variety of industries, ranging from furniture to the automotive sector, for which we have a dedicated, IATF 16949:2016-certified department," adds Alberti. "One of our key strengths is innovation: we invest heavily in technology, equipment selection, and product development."

"Another strength is our extreme flexibility, in terms of both the processes we perform and the industries we serve. In this journey towards complete vertical integration of our operations, the only process we are not currently carrying out in-house is anodising. I do not rule out the possibility that we may integrate this finishing technology as well in the future, but for the time being, we have noticed a market trend favouring coating. Our decision was also supported by the availability of a wide range of powder coatings with an anodised effect, which are remarkably realistic while offering far greater colour consistency and environmental sustainability. TIGER is a great help to us in this regard, thanks to its wide range of colours and special effects, particularly in the range of anodised-effect finishes."

"In 2017, TIGER Coatings developed the first colour chart for Stumpfmatt (ultra-matt) effects, when demand for super-matt finishes – including anodized effects – was beginning to emerge, and would soon become an architectural trend," explains Marzia Brambilla, COO at Tiger Coatings Italy (Bergamo). "Today, these effects are the solution many coating contractors turn to whenever possible. TIGER boasts one of the most extensive colour collections on the market, thanks to its long-standing, close relationship with the worlds of design and architecture." The choice of the right coating supplier thus becomes an integral part of Estral's service promise: it is not merely a matter of sourcing a raw material, but of securing high-quality, consistent standards, continuity, and responsiveness that match the requirements of its customers.

Consistent quality and technical guidance at the heart of the supplier-customer relationship

"In the extrusion market, we are recognised as a company that places the utmost emphasis on product quality," states Alberti. "Fifty years of history could not be 'tarnished' by failing to apply the same approach to coating. It was therefore essential for us to be meticulous and rigorous in both the process and the selection of suppliers."



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"We have been working with TIGER since installing our powder application plant in 2021, initially responding mainly to specific customer requests," notes Devid Battagliola, planning manager for Estral's coating department. "Thanks to the quality of their products and, above all, their batch-to-batch consistency, they are now our preferred powder supplier. Over the past five years, TIGER has reorganised internally at both technical and commercial levels, and the addition of more customer-focused staff has enabled our relationship to evolve, establishing a partnership that now encompasses not only the finishes specified by our customers but also the standard

colour range we previously sourced from other providers. We currently use several exclusive TIGER products, ranging from special finishes, of which we can purchase as little as a single box, to standard colours and high-turnover finishes. These include, for example, glossy white, our flagship colour, which we selected from TIGER's range to ensure the highest quality even on 'simple' finishes, if we can call them that."

"We have not developed any exclusive colours with TIGER because their product range covers all the finishes our customers require," says Battagliola. "This factor has also helped to expand our collaboration,



Unloading of glossy white profiles.



One of the 5 extrusion presses operated by Estral at its Manerbio (Brescia, Italy) site.

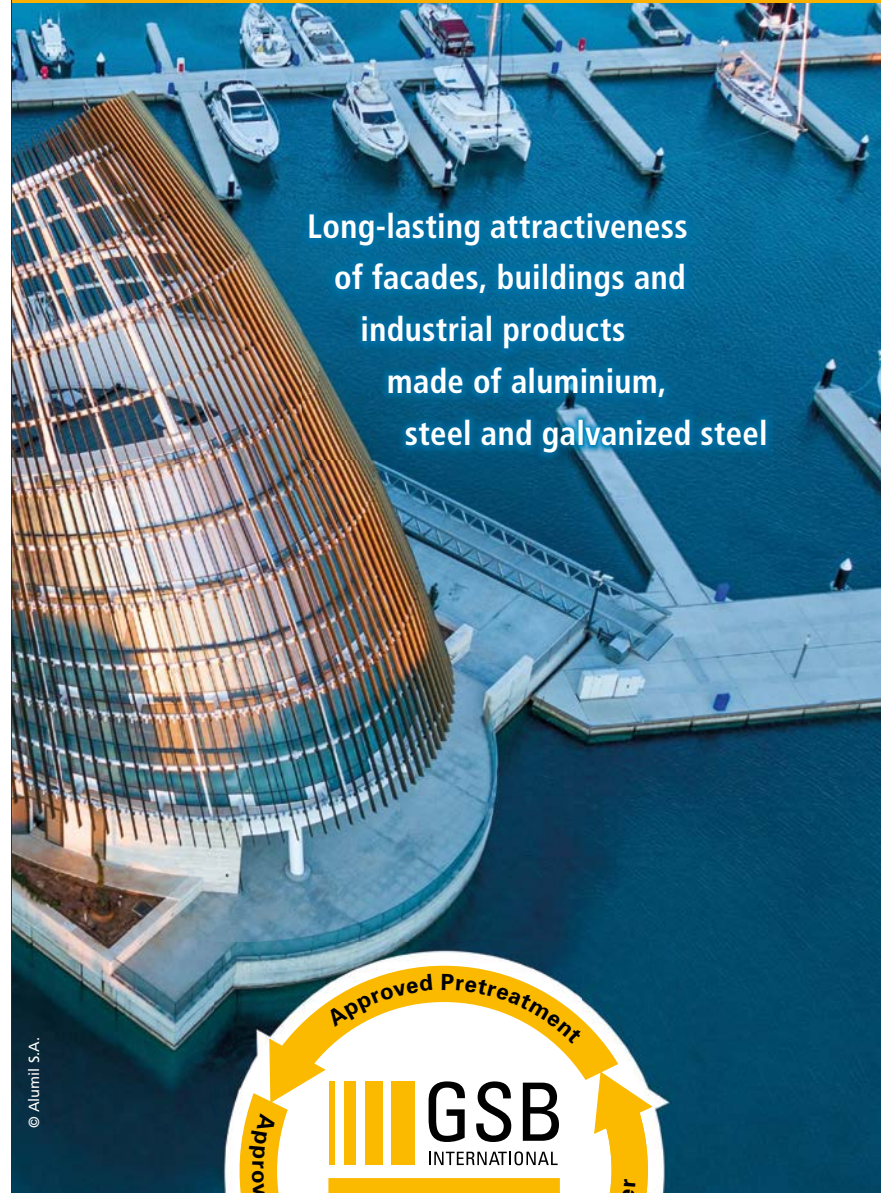


particularly as one of Estral's key strengths is providing customers with technical advice and guiding them in choosing colours, effects, and finishes. We have drawn on TIGER's expertise on numerous occasions, whenever we have faced specific technical requests or requirements that we were unable to handle on our own or that would have taken much longer to resolve. Its support has enabled us to resolve such issues quickly, helping us identify the nature of the problem and find a solution. They also assist us with Qualicoat certification, which was a completely new world to us when we implemented coating operations five years ago."



From the left: Alessia Venturi of ipcm®, Devid Battagliola of Estral, Marzia Brambilla of TIGER Coatings Italy and Giancarlo Alberti of Estral.

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"We have established a solid partnership with Estral, in line with our company's primary commercial objective," remarks Marzia Brambilla from TIGER. "Its team understands that our products' higher costs are more than offset by the resulting performances, the absence of rejects due to non-conformity, their consistent quality, and our assistance and problem-solving capabilities. What I find particularly interesting about working with Estral is its ability to guide customers in making technical choices about which powders to use, suggest alternatives, and steer them towards options with higher added value."

Prompt responses to enhance service delivery

Product quality, however, is only one of the necessary conditions for providing a comprehensive service: for Estral, paint suppliers must also be able to meet its needs in terms of logistics and service speed. "Delivery times for powder products have a significant impact on our own lead times," says Giancarlo Alberti. "Upstream of our coating plant, we have installed a compactable, mobile warehouse with a capacity of 1,500 tonnes for storing both our own extruded products and our customers' profiles, allowing material to be immediately available as and when required, in quantities ranging from a single bar to several tonnes. This has accelerated our turnaround times, making it essential that our powder supplier guarantees the same speed of delivery."

I believe that every step TIGER is taking in its development, including the opening of the new logistics hub in Dalmine, scheduled for 2027, is bringing it ever closer to meeting the needs of our customers."

This partnership, therefore, goes beyond the selection and supply of powders; it is integral to how Estral has built its new coating department, a technological solution designed to serve its customers and help them stand out in the market through the high-quality finishes of their profiles. 

Technical notes on Estral's coating line

The coating line, designed and installed by Euroimpianti (Valeggio sul Mincio, Verona, Italy), has a production capacity of 800 bars per hour (approximately 100 tonnes per week) with a maximum length of 7,500 mm. As Estral is Qualicoat Seaside certified, the pre-treatment phase comprises a two-stage alkaline-acid process and Henkel's Bonderite® nanotechnology-based conversion, sprayed via a PNR system. The line incorporates two application booths fitted with Gema spray guns and a powder coating unit featuring Smart-In-Line Technology. These booths ensure 99.9% powder recovery and operate simultaneously, one for light colours and the other for dark ones. The booths are connected to a Polifluid nitrogen generation system from Eurosider (Grosseto, Italy), which enhances film stretching and application consistency, particularly for metallic colours. The drying and curing ovens are adjacent, and an energy recovery and recycling system uses heat from the latter to warm the former. The coating plant is completed by an in-line laser paint stripping machine for the hanging hooks, also supplied by Euroimpianti, and a water treatment system from Italplant.