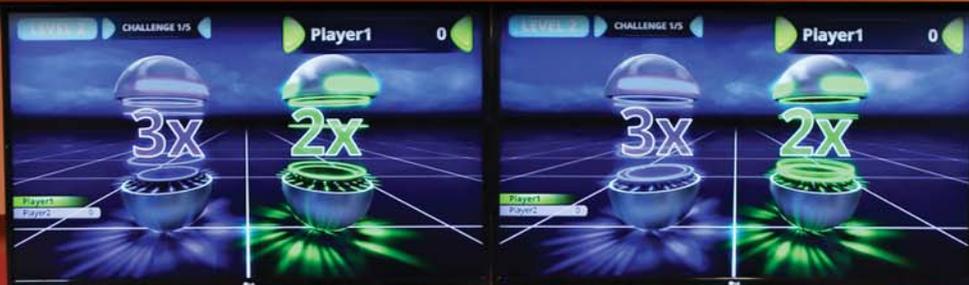


INTERNATIONAL BOWLING INDUSTRY

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QubicaAMF owners and Board of Directors from left to right: Roberto Vaioli, Pat Ciniello, Guido Sorba, Lucien Rochefort, Frank Mascadri, Luca Drusiani, Emanuele Govoni. Not pictured: Rich Albright.

25TH ANNIVERSARY

THE EVOLUTION OF QUBICAAMF

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25 YEARS YOUNG

The evolution of QUBICA^{AMF}

■ By Scott Frager

Where were you 25 years ago this month? 1993 was a demonstrative year for the world: Bill Clinton was sworn in as the 42nd President of the United States; Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk both received Nobel Peace Prizes; and the European Union was formally established. In an array of terrible foreshadowing, the

World Trade Center was bombed, for the *first* time. North Korea announced plans that it would withdraw from the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty. And, while Big Blue (IBM) reported the single greatest financial loss in U.S. corporate history, just under \$5 billion, three young men in Italy were preparing to embark on a bowling business journey of their lives. By the time the quarter century would pass,



From left to right: Lucien Rochefort, Emanuele Govoni, Guido Sorba, Frank Mascadri, Luca Drusiani, Roberto Vaioli, Pat Ciniello. Photos courtesy of QubicaAMF

their business story would be worthy of a white paper study at any major university business school.

While this writer is not a financial historian, research shows that while these were turbulent times in the world economy, the U.S. was just coming out of a short-lived recession. Fueled by the boom of the Internet high-tech, low interest rates, low energy prices and a growing housing market, the U.S. was primed for prosperity.

Back in Italy, three young entrepreneurs - Emanuele Govoni, Luca Drusiani and Roberto Vailoli - had decided to jump ship from the relative comfort of their well-paid and secure jobs at another small Italian bowling scoring company to create their own technology company focused entirely in the bowling business. Their dream was big and they knew that there was no way they could accomplish much if they stayed employees.

The troika felt that, at that time, current industry product offerings fell way short of their potential. Systems back then were complicated to use for both the proprietors, the management, and the customers. Govini opined, "One had to be an engineer or rocket scientist to use the current scoring systems."

These men knew in their hearts that if the game of bowling was fun and engaging, so must be everything associated with it. That included everything from the physical interface with the customer to the cables channeled underground or buried in ceilings that the customers would never see.

According to co-founder Govoni, he and his partners were "young and arrogant" when they set out to build their company. What has arguably become one of the "largest and most successful" bowling equipment providers in the world was launched with a series of unfortunate accidents. This innocence would be the new-founded company's saving grace in more ways than one in the months and years ahead.

The ultimate genesis of Qubica grew from the single spark that bowling is much greater than the sum of its sporting parts. Bowling has always had the inherent qualities that make up a great sport. No surprise for the nearly 12,000 bowling centers that flourished in the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s. However, by 1993 the bowling industry was fast approaching the critical tipping point where the league bowler count would be outnumbered by the growing mass of open play bowling. Bowling centers were disappearing from the landscape at a rapid pace for many reasons, and proprietors were beginning to get concerned about the direction of their fate.

The three Generation X partners relied on their instincts and a \$20,000 investment coming from an Italian bowling distributor named Guido Sorba, who officially became Qubica's fourth partner, to breathe their newborn

company to life. "We were kids. We were driven by technology. We wanted to create exceptional technology and keep it simple. We knew if we built it better, proprietors will buy it.

Quietly, Govoni, Drusiani, and Vaioli went to work as newly ordained entrepreneurs so often do, working days, nights, weekdays, and weekends to bring their scoring product to market. It took roughly six months to develop and install the first Qubica scoring system in Saint Etienne, Lyon, France. Conveniently, this center had the same scoring product that they helped developed for their previous employer, so, there was a level of trust between the proprietor and the Qubica team. A "very low" sales quote also helped the process along.

Exciting as it must have been to close their first sale, it wasn't long before the celebration stopped and the hard work began. From the very first night, the scoring system wouldn't score properly. And, to make matters even worse, the computer mouse stopped working. From fairytale to horror story at the stroke of midnight.

It took Vaioli, the partners' true programming genius, only a day to find and fix the programming errors and to get the system running as intended. However, it took the team a full two weeks working 18-hour days to get the job completed. It was absolutely essential for the team to do whatever it took to make their first customer satisfied.

According to the company, Qubica scored a slew of firsts in their quest to market: first to display video on the scoring system; first matrix camera to simplify setup and maximize pin detection accuracy; first touchscreen and mouse-driven front desk system; first digital game application (Qubicards) within the scoring system; first 3-D bowling graphics with sound; and first on-lane themed environments.

In 1994, Qubica's bright and successful future would be sealed by a fortuitous introduction and subsequent partnership with U.S. proprietor Pat Ciniello. Still the largest market on the

QubicaAMF's Italian headquarters.



COVER STORY



Part of the QubicaAMF Italian crew.

planet, the U.S. proprietors really needed a hometown hero with whom to fall in love. And fall in love they did! Ciniello was a well-respected bowling proprietor and also a reseller of various bowling products. He relied on his golden reputation as he hit the streets pitching Qubica scoring systems.

By 1995, Qubica became a bowling-household name. It was Govoni, the partners' marketing guru, who was able to mesmerize an otherwise staid and established bowling industry with an incredibly

smart and powerful marketing campaign. Govoni swarmed the bowling industry trade press with bold and beautiful advertising campaigns that sparked the imagination of the industry. It was his strategic marketing and unfettered creative skills that lifted the corporate and brand identity of Qubica from a new company to one that competes at the same level as its two major competitors and industry stalwart giants, AMF Bowling and Brunswick Bowling.

As the world rang in the new millennium, Qubica had divisions in the U.S.A., Asia and Australia. More than 14,000 lanes in 25 countries were sporting Qubica's scoring system. Its success begot success when Australian bowling proprietor and distributor Frank Mascadri became an essential partner within the Qubica Worldwide family. To date, all of the original Qubica partners and principals remain together.

Trade advertising wasn't the only type of marketing that helped Qubica become a well-known and trusted brand. Qubica was ever present at local, regional, national, and international trade shows. And, their participation was never less than "epic," according to Govoni. At a time when trade show attendance was dropping and most exhibitors were cutting down on

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COVER STORY



Software command center and development office in Bologna.

their footprints, Qubica took a bold and counter-trend approach and massively grew their overall presence at events. Additionally, Qubica re-introduced the idea of bringing fully-functional products to the trade show floors. Attendees at Qubica booths were treated to some wonderfully inviting food and beverage hospitality while they were roaming Qubica's elegantly-styled spaces.

All of a sudden, every other manufacturer and supplier were doubling down on their trade show presence in order to keep up with the Qubica caliber flair. As Qubica injected much-needed commitment to Bowl Expo and other trade shows, it had a multiplier effect on the entire industry. Exhibitors, booth counts and sponsorship dollars grew. These financial resources were invested back into the shows to invite more compelling guest speakers and better social and networking events. Many industry sponsors and partners began to immediately reinvest. Much credit for the above success has been given to longtime Qubica creative director, Federica Gozza. Within the first decade, Qubica's revenue grew to just under \$30 million with 27,000 lanes installed. During the second decade, Qubica set off a wave of mergers and acquisitions that absolutely astonished the bowling industry.

In 2002, Qubica acquired Mendes, a Canadian company that had brought their own major developments to the bowling trade: a unique magnetic automatic pinsetter that never really took off; a line of string machines; and maybe the first of the modern mini-lane systems. The wildly popular Highway66 branded mini bowling system captured the imagination and attention of the bowling and the family entertainment center businesses.

Fast forward to 2005 when Qubica merged with AMF Bowling Products. It is at this point that the corporate structure of the newly-evolved QubicaAMF became a virtual bowl of spaghetti. There are many plot twists and

turns worthy of its own Federico Fellini movie script. So many, in fact, that it isn't possible to detail them here in this story. It took almost 10 years for QubicaAMF to buy out the manufacturing division of AMF Bowling Corporation, AMF Bowling Products, and once again become a wholly owned company by the original founders.

Bologna, Italy, remains home to the QubicaAMF headquarters. It is within their modern and sleek three-story office building where Luca Drusiani oversees the operations of QubicaAMF. With factories in the U.S.A. and distributors and sales forces set up across the globe, keeping operations humming is no small feat for Drusiani. QubicaAMF has offices in 12 countries with representatives in approximately 30 countries. QubicaAMF proudly boasts an employee roster of 580+ teammates and growing.

This writer was recently given a personal tour of the QubicaAMF worldwide headquarters to get an up close and personal look at what it takes to keep an operation like QubicaAMF running. The impeccable building is carved into maze-like quarters for finance, accounting, technology, sales, marketing, research and development, and support services. There is an in-house manufacturing division that assembles and builds virtually every electronic component for their scoring systems. Within this building runs one of the most sophisticated business operations rivaling any high profile world-wide organization.

However, for Govoni, it's not what he has accomplished that makes him most proud. It's not the incredible leadership and stewardship of his partners whom he cares for like family. What motivates and captures Govoni's attention these days is

Part of the QubicaAMF team in Richmond.



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COVER STORY

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what is being born from the lower level of his Bologna offices. Within the relative privacy of the basement level lies a product that has taken a significant bite out of the QubicaAMF R&D budget. According to QubicaAMF co-founder and chief product architect Roberto Vaioli, the company has invested more than \$30 million in developing and improving their product line. And, in 2017, the company accelerated the pace of R&D investment by an additional 45% over the three years prior.

Just as inspired today as he was at the young age of 23, Govoni has been focusing much of his time these past three years to the launch of QubicaAMF's breakthrough product, HyperBowling. He describes his work as passionate, but those who know Govoni might be more apt to call him obsessive. HyperBowling is not just a new product to Govoni, a dreamer of dreams. This new concept has the potential to bring in the "other 94%" of the worldwide population who never bowls.

Describing HyperBowling in words can be a challenge. Imagine the love child between the best pinball has to offer with the game of bowling. Mix in seemingly endless permutations of challenges for guests of all ages and abilities and this begins to paint the picture. Govoni wants to shake up the way bowlers play the game of bowling just as Topgolf has done for the sport of golf.

HyperBowling will debut next month at Bowl Expo, and the entire QubicaAMF team would like to invite attendees to drop by their booth for some playtime and traditional QubicaAMF charm and hospitality. According to several insiders at the company, HyperBowling is probably the most complicated and challenging launch in the company's quarter century history. But to Govoni, the true beauty of a product is not the product itself as much as the process of making a complicated product elegantly simple. In other words, in order to make a truly



Manu and Pat back in the early days of QubicaAMF.



Luca, Manu and Roberto in the very early days of Qubica.

wonderful product, it has to be beautiful inside and out.

It is exactly at this juncture when Roberto Vaioli taps into his savant skillset. Vaioli takes great care making certain that every circuit board, every solder joint, wire, and cable are exactly where they should be. There is a sort of Zen-like reverence in the way Vaioli works on his drawings and designs.

Creative concepts and drawings aren't worth the price of the paper they're written on unless someone can transform those concepts and drawings into a product that customers can buy and use. To this writer, spending time with Luca Drusiani, wending his way through his world, felt like accompanying Willy Wonka on a tour of his chocolate factory. Drusiani's "factory" spans the world over every time zone, and in dozens of languages.

From software development, electronic and digital security, inventory management, and logistics and governmental regulations, Drusiani, with his team, is constantly dealing with dynamically changing environments. This man still walks and talks with the same excitement and energy he had 25 years ago.

Inspirationally, all six of the QubicaAMF founders, owners, and board members continue to maintain their boyish charms. The company's exponential growth and business success haven't seemed to change the essence of their character. Quite the contrary. Like a fine, vintage Italian wine, these gentlemen have aged and deepened as has the company they've worked so hard building. Success has matured and bloomed into an extraordinary product, indeed. ❖



Scott Frager has been the publisher of *IBI* magazine for the past 22 years. He has worked extensively in the bowling industry; as the executive director of the Bowling Centers of Southern California; as the general manager of a center in Southern California; and with Kids Bowl Free. He currently resides in Leawood, Kansas, with his wife and three children.