

## CASE STUDY

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## SFA CELEBRATES 60 YEARS OF PLUMBING INNOVATION

There are two types of product manufacturers: One replicates an existing service or technology and attempts to make improvements that will stand out from the competition. The second *innovates* a groundbreaking service or technology, setting a new standard for future competitors to model.

Throughout its 60-year history, Société Française d'Assainissement (Group SFA) has always been, and continues to be, an innovator.

From its inception in 1958, to its expansion throughout Europe and, eventually, North America, Group SFA has revolutionized the ease and flexibility of commercial and residential bathroom installations through its macerating technology. To this day, the company keeps delighting both plumbing contractors and homeowners with game-changing product innovations and upgrades.



View of Saniflo's Brégy, France factory. The company controls more than 70 percent of production internally.

### The Beginning

Group SFA's story began in postwar France, amidst a climate of structural devastation and meager resources. Innovation is often spurred by necessity. For example, today's development of electric cars is a direct response to the rising price of oil. Back in postwar France, the main necessity for people was finding some way to pick up their lives after seeing their homes and land destroyed.

Forced into communal living spaces with shared bathrooms, many French people found themselves longing for the days when they could shower in their own home. Of course, installing a private bathroom was no easy task, requiring financial and material resources that few could afford.

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This was the necessity that spurred innovation when Group SFA entered the scene in 1958. Originally a designer of water treatment plant equipment, the company had invented the macerator, which could reduce waste to slurry and pump it to a main drain line.

It seems simple, but the invention would have a profound impact on the future of plumbing. The common denominator for all macerating systems is their ability to handle plumbing applications that have no below-floor drainage. This lack of drainage makes the installation of conventional plumbing fixtures impossible or at least cost-prohibitive — especially if breaking through concrete is required.

But there's no breaking through floors with a macerator. Instead of routing wastewater below the floor, the macerator pumps effluent up to reach the main sewer or septic tank line.

As a result, toilets, sinks and other plumbing fixtures can be installed atop finished floors virtually anywhere in a home: the basement, an attic, a spare bedroom, a garage or utility room, even under a stairway or inside a closet. Walls and floors remain intact. The installation is accomplished quickly and economically with minimal disturbance to the room layout. In fact, the system can be fully operational in as little time as half a day.

The SFA solution was just what the postwar French needed. They could now install their own private bathrooms again without great hassle and expense. More important, it represented a path forward after the war and a return to normalcy.

### Expansion and Growth

Group SFA's first factory was established in the early 1960s in the Parisian suburb of Issy Les Moulineaux. This original factory assembled the products, which were manufactured by a third party. By 1977, the company, in an effort to take fuller control over the manufacturing process, opened a factory in Brégy to produce its macerators and pumps.

The next couple of decades saw Group SFA continue to integrate its manufacturing process vertically and spread across Europe. The Brégy plant expanded in the 1980s, and by the 1990s, the company had subsidiaries stretching from England to Russia.

During the 1990s, SFA became one of the first industrial companies in France to begin a quality certification process, and its production facilities earned ISO-certification.



Regis Saragosti, CEO of Saniflo USA, has doubled sales and increased market share to 90 percent.

At this point, the company felt confident to share its innovative plumbing solution with those living across the pond after learning of the increasing demand. More and more people wanted the flexibility to install bathrooms wherever they pleased—from outdoor areas to basements. Thus, the late 1980s saw Group SFA's expansion into Canada and, in 1998, the company arrived in the United States.

Saniflo became Group SFA's U.S. subsidiary, and the Saniplus was the first macerating product the company introduced in this country. Used to install a complete bathroom up to 15 feet below the sewer line, or even up to 150 feet away from a soil stack, the Saniplus can handle effluent from a toilet, sink and tub/shower. This and future product releases were modified for U.S. codes and standards.

Over the past 20 years, Saniflo has redefined the plumbing market in the United States. Much of that success has been due to Regis Saragosti, who has been CEO of Saniflo operations in the United States for the past decade, and who is now assuming responsibility over North America, including Mexico and Canada. Since taking the subsidiary-company's reins, Saragosti has doubled sales and increased market share to 90 percent.

Saniflo has accomplished this spectacular growth largely by educating plumbing contractors that the product is a much-preferred alternative to sewage ejection pumps and expensive concrete drilling. This has involved teaming up with local and national plumbing organizations such as the Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors Association (PHCC), WIT & Co., OMNI Corporate Services Ltd., Embassy Group Ltd. and AD. Furthermore, Saniflo has placed a priority on running a robust B2C campaign to support this network of distributors. By cooperating with these organizations and supporting continuing education and vocational courses nationwide, Saniflo is able to ensure that its message reaches young professionals as they enter the workforce.

Besides grassroots education efforts, Saniflo has invested heavily in marketing, running national trade and television advertising campaigns, writing case studies of its products' success stories, and publishing editorial in trade and consumer publications nationwide. It has also leveraged social media to engage customers directly, explaining the Saniflo solution while addressing their concerns.

## More than Just Macerators

From its inception, Group SFA has been expanding its offering of plumbing solutions. Today, the manufacturer offers a wide range of macerators, grinders and drain pumps for both residential and commercial applications, as well as other products.

In addition to offering traditional macerators and heavy-duty grinders that install as separate components either in front of or behind the wall, Group SFA offers a toilet bowl with built-in macerator called the Sanicomact. This unit, named for its compact design, saves space and water with its dual flush option.



The Sanicom 1 from Saniflo can handle temperatures up to 194°F, making it perfect for demanding applications.

The company also offers vitreous china, floor-mounted toilet bowls that are compatible with some of its macerators and grinders. Available in round and elongated models, the toilets meet the WaterSense® labeling criteria of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and use only 1.28 gallons per flush (1.28 GPF). The elongated model, which measures 28.75 inches deep, complies with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) because of its shape and height.

Group SFA also offers a full line of gray water drain pumps that handle laundry and kitchen applications. The Sanicom 1, for example, is built with restaurants in mind, able to handle 194°F water—crucial where dishwashers must operate at exceptionally high temperatures to meet health and sanitation standards.

For homeowners with high-efficiency appliances, such as boilers and tankless water heaters that produce significant levels of condensate, Group SFA offers both a condensate pump, as well as a neutralizer kit that, to help prevent corrosion, increases the pH of the acidic water before discharging it to the drain line. Group SFA has even tapped the marine and RV markets. Sanimarin electric macerators are specifically designed to replace manual hand pump toilets on all types of boats. They not only fit the small spaces allotted on vessels for toilets, but consume minimal water and electricity.

Diversifying its product offering has allowed Group SFA to stand apart from its competitors and meet a variety of customers' needs.

## Looking to the Future

Group SFA has continued to integrate vertically to the point that it now controls more than 70 percent of production internally, including the product molds and, since 2008, the motors. In total, the company has almost 200,000 square feet of manufacturing facilities and 160,000 square feet of warehousing facilities.

The year 2013 saw yet another expansion in the Brégy factory to allow for increased product testing. Most recently, the company has begun producing its own electronic cards for products like the Sanicubic 2, allowing for increased quality control. The future most certainly holds additional expansions and even higher levels of vertical integration.

In addition, the company looks to continue its reputation as a product innovator and educator. The past 60 years of success have taught Group SFA that it's not just the product that customers want, but also the qualities that come with it. In this case, ease-of-installation, ease-of-use and, most importantly, the flexibility and freedom to install plumbing anywhere are what matter most and will carry the company into the future.

For technical or installation questions, visit [go.saniflo.com](http://go.saniflo.com) or call 1-800-571-8191.

See how Saniflo works: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkeRtNvv6gY>