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INTERVIEW

Dr. Werner Wittmann about Wittmann Battenfeld:

“A policy of continuous innovation and an efficient sales network”

Dr. Wittmann, it is now more than a year since the Wittmann group took over the injection molding machine manufacturer Battenfeld. Where does the group stand today?

Dr. Werner Wittmann: “After more than a year, we can give a very positive account. Last year, we immediately started by reviewing the business plan. Since then, we have made considerable progress on the road to a successful future for Wittmann Battenfeld GmbH.

Today, we are optimally positioned as a group. The teams at the various facilities work together well. Profitable synergies have been created in the areas of sales, procurement and production. With the optimization of manufacturing and assembly processes, and further progress in the harmonization of various machine components, we have achieved substantial improvements in efficiency.

Our positioning as a one-stop supplier with the concept of “everything from a single source” is meeting with a very positive response from the market and has been welcomed by injection molding processors worldwide. As a family-owned company, we offer stable long-term prospects, reliability and innovative strength, and are having a decisive influence on the further development of injection molding technology, to the benefit of its users.

The fewer suppliers of individual components are needed, the easier and more trouble-free operations will become for processors. Therefore we can offer processors substantial advantages as the only one-stop supplier worldwide.”

Which new developments have you successfully completed in the course of last year?

Dr. Werner Wittmann: “Immediately after the takeover, we extended the proven TM toggle machine series by adding the high-speed TM Xpress version. This series is used especially in the packaging industry for in-mold labeling and thin-walled applications. The necessary tooling for cups and containers, together with insertion and removal automation equipment, are offered together with the machines by our French subsidiary specializing in IML applications.

With the new ‘insider solution’, we have created equipment to manufacture injection-molded parts in a minimum of space and thus at extremely low cost. Moreover, at Fakuma 2008, we presented for the first time a fully integrated robot solution based on the new W8 robot series. As part of this concept, we offer visualization, setting and storage of robot data via the touch screen of the machine’s Unilog B6 control system.

We have also developed a fully automatic manufacturing concept with the new VM R rotary table series. This series is now available with servo-electric drives for the rotary table and the injection unit. Servo technology contributes substantially to cutting energy consumption, with a simultaneous increase in precision and line speed.

In the area of service and training programs, the Webservice program has been developed on the basis of the proven Unilog B6 machine control system, which operates under Windows XP. It allows direct communication between the customer’s injection molding machine and our hotline, without interconnection of additional hardware. This offers our customers the advantages of fast troubleshooting, direct software updates and preventive maintenance.”

What latest developments are currently in the pipeline? What can processors look forward to at the next Fakuma?

Dr. Werner Wittmann: “In order to underscore our competence as one-stop suppliers, Wittmann Kunststoffgeräte and Wittmann Battenfeld will present themselves for the first time on a joint booth at this year’s Fakuma.

The exhibition highlight will be the world premiere of our cost-optimized all-electric machine series. It will be available in sizes from 35 to 300 t and replace the previous all-electric range. This new, energy-efficient series scores with numerous advantages. It features a compact, beltless injection unit as well as a clean clamping unit model without greasing. This already ensures perfect clean room compatibility of the standard version. Apart from minimal maintenance requirements, this is of great benefit for applications especially in the medical, electronic and packaging industries.

In the area of micro injection molding, we are currently working at full speed on the next generation of the Microsystem 50. Thanks to its many years of experience combined with leading mold, machine and manufacturing expertise, Battenfeld is the recognized technology leader in this field. The standard model is being redesigned on the basis of the existing successful concept and will be available in two sizes, with 5 and 15 t clamping force. In addition to higher clamping force, it will offer the advantages of a wider range of shot weights as well as greater flexibility for appropriate downstream processes and insertion technology. The new model will be on display for the first time at Hanover Fair in April 2010.

Our medium-term focus is on reentering the large-size machine segment, up to 1,600 t clamping force. Battenfeld has always been a producer of large machines, therefore it is a perfectly logical move to offer our customers this technology once more in future. A compact 2-platen clamping unit is being developed, which will be up for sale from the second quarter of 2010.”

Immediately following the takeover, you announced an amalgamation of the two sales networks. How far has the implementation been achieved?

Dr. Werner Wittmann: “One of our primary targets was to bring our global sales network together as quickly as possible. During the first few weeks, we already implemented this step in various national markets, such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Mexico, Singapore and China.

The amalgamation process is now almost completed. Due to special market structures, the sales and service activities in Austria, Italy, Switzerland and Brazil are still organized in separate subsidiaries of Wittmann or Wittmann Battenfeld, which, however, cooperate very closely. Other key markets are being served by agencies of long standing.

Our target is clear: an efficient network covering the whole world, to offer our customers concentrated responsibility in sales and service.

Our expansion policy currently focuses on Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). In May, for example, we opened a new subsidiary in Romania. In Hungary, we have also further extended our activities by opening a new sales office near Budapest in March. Wittmann has been successful in the Hungarian market for many years – we have manufactured robots, sprue pickers and various components for products from our wide range of peripheral equipment lines in Mosonmagyaróvár since 1997.

With the new subsidiaries, we are strengthening our position in the CEE region, in response to the rapidly expanding market potential in that area.”

What are your plans for the new sales and service center in Meinerzhagen, due to be opened in September?

Dr. Werner Wittmann: “Germany represents one of the key markets for injection molding machines, peripheral equipment and automation systems. By our decision to build a new facility, we intend to provide even more comprehensive support to our local customers in developing and implementing manufacturing solutions. Our customer support will also be extended and strengthened by this move. Battenfeld has a long tradition in Meinerzhagen - the first production facility was established here in 1954.

The new building will accommodate a total of 2,500 m² in storage space with a modern logistics system for storage and shipping of spare parts, production facilities for Airmould and Aquamould equipment, and a generously dimensioned, 1,100m² technical lab. The technical lab for machine demonstrations, production of samples and training programs for customers will be equipped with a selection from our range of injection molding machines and peripheral devices.

Wittmann Battenfeld in Meinerzhagen is the central contact partner in Germany for any and all requests from customers, including sales, general customer support and technical support. One of its tasks will be to supply spare parts and technical support for the large-size machines formerly manufactured there - both locally and internationally.”

The plastics industry has been very severely hit by the current economic crisis. What counter-measures have you taken?

Dr. Werner Wittmann: “We have been affected by the economic crisis just like the entire plastics industry. To our regret, a recent retrenchment of our staff level has proved unavoidable in spite of counter-measures already taken at an early stage, such as reduced working hours and special leave for advanced education and training. By establishing a work foundation, we are trying to make this move as socially compatible as possible for the affected staff members.

All our actions are invariably focused on our customers. We do everything in our power to ensure their satisfaction and offer them advantages.

We have therefore created two packages to bridge the current situation, which is also difficult for many processors:

With the “***FIT FOR THE FUTURE Service Check***” we inspect customers’ machines to ascertain their technical condition at a special price, readjust the basic parameters and offer counseling to optimize energy consumption.

In the “***FIT FOR THE FUTURE Machine Upgrade***” campaign, we replace used machines with new machines at a special price.

It is hardly possible to foresee when this crisis will end. But one thing is sure: there will be a recovery. And Wittmann Battenfeld is well prepared to meet it with a policy of continuous innovation and an efficient sales and service network.”



Fig. 1: Dr. Werner Wittmann, Wittmann Kunststoffgeräte GmbH

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