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"Mono-material structures are increasingly in demand"

Interview on the way to K 2025 with Markus Gschwandtner, Managing Director and Chief Sales Officer (CSO) at Brückner Maschinenbau

Mr Gschwandtner, how does Brückner stand its ground in the face of increasing international competition?

We achieve this through innovation. Our aim is to always be one step ahead in terms of technology. Competition has indeed become more intense, with new providers in our industry segment coming primarily from Asian countries, which is why we have to counter this with innovation, focusing on our research and development department. It is a relatively large department within our company, which has been expanded even further recently. Our technical centre plays a key role in this regard, as it is the technology centre par excellence within our sector. This technical centre brings together all the well-known partners in our value chain, from raw material manufacturers to users, from Dow and Total to PepsiCo; they all try out their innovations with us, testing to see what works and what doesn't.

Can you provide an example?

In our technical centre for example, we test structures that we need as part of the transition to a circular economy. We are carrying out tests with packaging mono-materials that usually consists of different materials, for example, a bowl with a lid on top. The development is shifting towards manufacturing this product from one single material, so that it can be recycled later. These mono-material structures are increasingly in demand these days. The circular economy is clearly the driver here. Just a few years ago, functionality was the most important goal. Packaging had to be easy to print on, it had to have good barrier functions, and it had to be easy to seal for reasons of hygiene. All this was achieved with different

materials, different plastics, but also paper or aluminium. The trend towards reducing this mix of materials was clearly fuelled by EU regulations, aimed at boosting the circular economy. At our technical centre, we can show that we are able to manufacture a product from mono-material that previously consisted of five or more materials.

If the mono-material products are easily recyclable, are the recyclates also suitable for use in food packaging?

So far only to a very limited extent. It requires authorisation from the food control authorities in the individual countries, such as food approval from the American FDA, for example. In addition to collecting the plastics, it is very important to sort them, in order to keep them as pure as possible. During mechanical recycling, the plastics are shredded, melted, filtered and processed back into raw materials. In this process, it is not very easy to get the same food approval again. This is certainly the case with chemical recycling; it can actually go back into the same application.

How do you recruit the technical staff needed for your innovations?

Young talent plays a very important role for us. Employees who have been with us for a long time naturally contribute their experience, but the new employees bring new technologies with them, and they can also handle them, for example, with artificial intelligence. We have entered into partnerships with universities and colleges so that we can attract these new talents. Today, talented young people do their internships, and write their Bachelor's and Master's theses at our company. These well-trained individuals are very familiar with all the new technology. Once they join us, we introduce them to our business. We also attract young people on dual training programmes, always with the aim of utilising their knowledge in other areas at Brückner.

What is the situation like in your international subsidiaries?

We now also have excellent junior staff there, especially in India and China. The young people who join us there are very well trained. They hone their technological skills at Brückner on our customers' construction sites. They show a lot of initiative and are prepared to adapt to cultural differences. At the same time, their country-specific perspective helps us to better understand and serve the different customs and needs of our customers in those countries. The new employees at home and abroad, together with our technical centre, ensure that we remain innovative.

Do collaborations also play a role in this regard?

We have always worked with partners over the last 50 years. The early innovations came from collaborating with those manufacturing partners, and they are partnerships that we have expanded. Today, we also carry out joint projects with research institutes such as Fraunhofer, or the universities in Rosenheim and Aachen, which conduct important plastics research. Again, our technical centre is the linchpin. In addition to the circular economy, organic raw materials, both biodegradable ones, and those made from renewable raw materials, are currently a major topic in this field.

Where is the plastics machinery industry heading?

Plastic has a bright future. The material has undeniably great advantages. It is light, easy to mould, inexpensive and is the material with the lowest carbon footprint in production compared to other materials such as metal or glass. If it can then be recycled as well, then that would make it the most sustainable of all. Achieving this is largely the task of plastics engineering, which therefore also has a bright future.

Video statement by Markus Gschwandtner and Sebastian Lange:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAkWZEmdxQM&list=PLN1k-IPccLmHTYB1hQyiJIldtUDF5JrxA&index=1>

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Industry interviews on the way to the K:

It is impossible to imagine a world without plastic. And plastics are indispensable for mastering our future challenges. The plastics industry develops solutions so that a growing world population can live safely and prosperously. This important role as an enabler is expressed in the motto of K 2025: The Power of Plastics! Green - Smart - Responsible. Green, because plastics help to combat climate change and conserve resources. Smart, because digitalisation helps to increase efficiency. Responsible, because the focus is on people. To get in the mood for the industry meeting in October 2025, the VDMA is giving representatives of the plastics machinery industry and of all other stakeholders in the sector a chance to have their say in a series of interviews.

VDMA Plastics and Rubber Machinery

More than 200 companies are members of the trade association, covering over 90 per cent of industry's production in Germany. Ten per cent of our member companies come from Austria, Switzerland and France. The German member companies account for a turnover of 7 billion euros in core machine construction and 10 billion euros including peripheral technology. In terms of value, one in four plastics machines manufactured worldwide comes from Germany; the export rate is 70 per cent. Chairman of the trade association is Ulrich Reifenhäuser, Managing Partner of Reifenhäuser GmbH & Co KG.