

All things to all men

Speaking of Kroenert's future, CEO Dr Tarik Vardag foresees a company that will become the technological leader in all converting disciplines so C2 went to Hamburg to talk to both him and Kroenert's sales director Michael Schmalz.



Michael Schmalz and Dr Tarik Vardag in conversation with Franz Hermann, publisher of C2

C2: "Dr Vardag, please give our readers a short overview of your professional career?"

Dr Tarik Vardag: "I have spent my entire career in international machinery and plant engineering. In my work as managing director of Oerlikon's textile subsidiary Neumag, in particular, there were many similarities to Kroenert's, BMB's and Drytec's lines. Here, too, we were also concerned with roll stock and speed, uniformity and width requirements."

C2: "How do you rate Kroenert's position now, after the end of the financial crisis?"

Dr T. Vardag: "Kroenert came through the crisis comparatively well, even though incoming orders fell during that period. I think the team was successful in identifying and developing new areas of the market

through carefully targeted innovations. The crisis period was very well used to open up new markets and to acquire initial orders from them."

C2: "Which markets do you mean in particular?"

Dr T. Vardag: "I would especially like to emphasise the new technologies in the field of electronics such as lithium-ion batteries, printed electronics, organic LEDs and flexible photovoltaics. We have recently received various orders of great strategic importance in this area."

"Using our new laboratory machine, we were able to test the most modern of coating solutions in a setting that meets the demands of these new technologies."

"Of course, our laboratory machines differ greatly from the classical laboratory lines. We don't go 'from lab to fab' but 'from fab to lab'."

INFORMATION

■ In November 2010, Vardag became the new CEO of Maschinenfabrik Max Kroenert (Hamburg), BMB Bachofen + Meier AG (Bülach/Switzerland) and Drytec Trocknungs- und Befeuchtungstechnik (Hamburg-Norderstedt), succeeding Walter Reiter, who left the company in October 2010.

"This means that, in principle, our laboratory machine is a small production line and as such offers the user the possibility to conduct test-runs under real production conditions, and to later take the step from a pilot project to larger production lines."

C2: "How has your laboratory machine done on the market since its premiere one year ago?"

Dr T. Vardag: "Since then we have sold these machines to research facilities as well as to industrial companies. It is particularly important for us to have been able to establish ourselves in markets that we believe have a future."

"With our technological expertise, we would like to contribute in helping these innovative developments achieve commercial breakthroughs."

C2: "In this context what role does your technology centre in Hamburg play?"

Dr T. Vardag: "Our technology centre is essential in being able to show our customers what they can achieve with our coating machines."

INFORMATION

■ Dr Tarik Vardag studied physics at the University of Regensburg and the University of Colorado, USA, and has more than 15 years' experience in executive positions for international machine and plant engineering companies.

His specialist areas during this time were distribution, project and general management. Over the past few years, Vardag has worked at Uhde (Dortmund), Fresenius SE (Bad Homburg), and as the CEO of Oerlikon Neumag (Neumünster) among others.

We will continue to modernise and expand it."

Michael Schmalz: "This expertise in research is especially impor-

tant because, where new technologies are concerned, we are much more consultants than we are vendors. Customers come to us at a time when they still have considerable need for development."

"In co-operation with our suppliers we then search for new solutions for new products together and tailor our basic knowledge of coating to the specific needs of the customer in order to develop cost-effective and high quality products."

C2: "Are we correct in saying that, for buyers of coating machines, it is not only the machine itself but also its servicing and warranty that are becoming ever more important?"

M. Schmalz: "Yes, and I think we are very well able to offer such benefits. Of course, this also has something to do with the size of our company. A 10-man company can't do what we can with over 400 employees in the group."

"We offer a 24-hour emergency service, not through a call centre, but manned by experienced employees who can be reached 24 hours per day, seven days a week. In addition, our customers can make use of a TeleLine service through which our experts can solve electronic problems through a modem connection without having to travel to the site."

"Last but not least 1.5 years ago we began offering our customers a special service agreement, of which I am particularly proud. This involves a full service of the machines up to twice per year."

"This includes a preventative analysis, which identifies problems that may arise in the future with the operation of the machine and what can be done about it. In addition, we commit to sending a technician within 24 hours should there be technical problems on site."

C2: "How many of your customers already make use of this service?"

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M. Schmalz: "Currently, around 40 mainly medium-sized companies. In the future we will also be offering this optional special support for companies who are running Kroenert machines that are more than 10 years old."

C2: "With Kroenert and Drytec in Hamburg and BMB in Bülach you are maintaining three different machine engineering sites in Germany and Switzerland. Will you hold on to these sites or are mergers planned?"

Dr T. Vardag: "Our three production sites are not up for discussion. The site of each company is like its own centre of excellence – BMB for winder building, Kroenert for the complete application technology and Drytec for drying."

"In the future we will co-ordinate and dovetail the different processes even more but there are no mergers planned. In fact, we are much more interested in further expanding each of these areas of expertise."

"This is because our goal is to be the technology leader in all areas and to expand on this position in order to be able to develop high-quality and cost-effective solutions for our customers."

"Thanks to the fact that we didn't lose any personnel during the economic crisis, but rather increased our value-added share and outsourced less, we are well placed to process new orders."

C2: "Can you identify any changes in the current



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ordering behaviour of your customers?"

M. Schmalz: "At the moment there is some reorientation taking place. The very large machines, which run at 1000m/min with a working width of 2400mm, are increasingly in less demand. Medium-sized machines have become more attractive again, particularly in technical coating processes."

"Our customers are primarily concerned with greater flexibility and higher productivity. We must meet these demands and, in so doing, bring machines onto the market with a more attractive price tag."

Dr T. Vardag: "The positive side of the current situation, in which we are taking on more smaller and middle-sized orders, is that we are no longer as dependent on large, individual orders. This gives us more security in our planning."

C2: "In concluding, we would like to know where you see the particular strengths of Kroenert, BMB and Drytec in this competitive market."

Dr T. Vardag: "We don't see ourselves now and in the future as a company dedicated to engineering, and buying in expertise. The strength of all our European innovation centres is that, although we don't manufacture everything in-house, we do manufacture all the things that have an effect on the quality of our customers' end products." ■