

“One plus one” equals more than two!

KROENERT and Coatema regard their alliance under the umbrella of ATH as a win-win situation for customers, companies and employees

In August 2018, it was announced that ATH Altonaer-Technologie-Holding GmbH from Hamburg – owner of KROENERT – would acquire all shares in Coatema Coating Machinery in Dormagen. On this occasion, C2 spoke exclusively with Dr Tarik Vardag, managing director of ATH, KROENERT and Coatema, and Dr Andreas Giessmann, managing director of Coatema, about the new forward-looking alliance, important core markets and expanded opportunities for mutual customers.

C2: Dr Vardag, Dr Giessmann, for a long time the name KROENERT stood for particularly fast and large coating systems. In recent years, Coatema has made a name for itself primarily with pilot plants. How will the two companies strategically position themselves in the market in the future?

Dr Tarik Vardag: About ten years ago, KROENERT entered the narrow web segment with LabCo and, if I may say so, also enjoyed this market segment very much. But you are right, of course, KROENERT stands first and foremost for large and wide plants on which our customers primarily manufacture commodity products. But obviously the other market areas are also of great interest to us and so we have seen numerous attractive opportunities here in particular to make a big difference together with Coatema.

Dr Andreas Giessmann: I can only underline that! We see KROENERT and Coatema as two companies that can penetrate the market much better together.

C2: Then you will certainly be able to take advantage of numerous attractive synergies arising from the merger of your two companies in the future?

Dr T. Vardag: Yes, definitely. An interesting development has taken place here: While five years ago we saw ourselves first and foremost as competitors, our first discussions showed that this is no longer the case. Quite simply,



Dr Andreas Giessmann and Dr Tarik Vardag

this is because our respective fields of activity and focal points have developed differently. This is how we at KROENERT see our task in working together with our customers to develop ways of optimising the processes of existing products. Coatema, on the other hand, has particular strengths in all questions of basic process development. As you can see, the overlaps here are relatively small.

C2: On the other hand, both companies have certainly appeared as competitors in the field of printed electronics ...

Dr T. Vardag: Yes, although KROENERT was particularly successful at printed electronics when it came to production and manufacturing optimisation, while Coatema scored particularly well in the areas of new and process development.

Dr A. Giessmann: The printed electronics area of expertise is a good example of our expertise: Coatema picks up customers when they come up with a product idea, and at this early stage some of them still don't know anything about process engineering or need advice on chemical issues. Here Coatema



KROENERT is mainly known for its large-format coating lines for the production of commodities

offers prototype lines. If these ideas go into production scale and mass production, this is exactly the interface to KROENERT.

C2: Then you certainly didn't have any antitrust concerns to resolve?

Dr T. Vardag: No, absolutely not. The acquisition of Coatema was not about buying market shares, but about strategically complementing and strengthening each other.

C2: How did your customers - your mutual and also your respective customers – react to the news?

Dr T. Vardag: Interestingly, very similar. Both KROENERT customers and Coatema customers have noticed: that really makes sense!

Dr A. Giessmann: In fact, nobody asked "Why are you going to merge now?", but this alliance was immediately understood as a comprehensible and meaningful step. We can now serve our customers from the product idea to mass production – an invaluable advantage!

C2: According to your strategy, will the two brands KROENERT and Coatema be retained?

Dr A. Giessmann: Absolutely, it is part of our strategy to retain these established and renowned names that stand for certain brand cores.

Dr T. Vardag: The same naturally

applies to the production sites, because we are aware that the brands are shaped by their employees. It is therefore in our own interest to preserve this structure.

Dr A. Giessmann: Accordingly, our employees have reacted to the changes in a positive way, as they too see the opportunity to do much more together than just in their own world.

C2: How will your sales network be organised in the future? Do you appear together or do you still have different contact persons?

Dr T. Vardag: We appear separately, but we have a very close and intensive exchange of information about our activities so that we can "pass the baton". The respective sales and representative teams remain in place, as they also serve different markets and offer products.

C2: Research and development: Will there be joint activities here?

Dr T. Vardag: We are coordinating our research and development work, but we do not necessarily conduct joint research and also maintain our two pilot plants. Our two companies together have 15 pilot plants, 12 of which are located at Coatema in Dormagen. This equipment is second to none. While here in Hamburg three large pilot plants are on production scale, Coatema has numerous smaller and very flexible pilot plants. Therefore, it makes sense

to leave these two competence centres and also to open them for the customers of the respective partner company.

C2: Which markets will be your particular focus in the future?

Dr T. Vardag: Not only the new markets are of interest to KROENERT, but of course also the classic markets such as siliconisation and barrier coating. We will pay special attention to these topics! But there will also be new markets, in the development of which we want to enter as early as possible. We see Coatema's focus in the areas of renewables and printed electronics, among others.

Dr A. Giessmann: Yes, that's right, this also applies to the market for flexible touch panels, which is slowly growing out of its infancy and where there is an increasing demand for large systems. The transition to mass production is in progress and we will see the results in five or six years at the latest. Here in particular, we can benefit outstandingly from our synergies.

Dr T. Vardag: Since the step to production maturity is being taken more and more frequently in the future markets mentioned – and this is also a significant achievement of Coatema's development work – they are of course of extraordinary interest to both companies. Another important market for us is composites, where we will be represented with different approaches and offers. We see a great deal of potential in the entire area of membranes, and also in the fields of pharmaceutical and medical technology.

Dr A. Giessmann: As you know, we have a promising cooperation with OPTIMA and the joint brand COMEDCO in the areas of transdermal plasters and oral dispersible films, which we are actively promoting. In addition to thin-film technology, we are also interested in the nano-structuring of surfaces. Under the brand name TEMICOAT, we are working with TEMICON on this exciting topic.

Dr T. Vardag: As you can see, we can get a lot out of this merger of KROENERT and Coatema under the ATH umbrella. One plus one is sometimes more than two. ■

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Especially in narrow web lines for process development, Coatema has earned itself a good reputation