

AUTOMATION SPECIALISTS

FUTRONIC

Strong ties for international success



Michael Feider,
VP Sales & Marketing at Jetter

Jetter AG, which celebrated its 40th anniversary last year, took over futronic back in 2006. The aim was to bundle the two firms' strengths and profit from their enormous pool of experience. Today, both automation specialists belong to the Swiss Bucher Industries Group.

As companies of the Bucher Specials division, Jetter and futronic reap the benefits of various formal and informal networks within the Group coupled with the concentration of resources and competencies in international projects.

Martin Jetter, Jetter's founder and present Chairman of the Supervisory Board, was very enthusiastic at the time about the attractive synergies that would be created by the cooperation. The two companies have forged close ties since then. "We've been working together in a trustful partnership for many years now," says Michael Feider, VP Sales & Marketing at Jetter. "It's extremely successful on all levels." The main focus of the cooperation is on control cabinet construction – a branch of production that 'futronic excels at'. People from futronic are involved in numerous Ludwigsburg-managed projects: they take care of the entire electrical engineering, supply the control cabinets with controls and drives

and commission the machines on site at the customer's. In return, futronic purchases a higher proportion of printed circuit boards and complete modules from Jetter, for instance for its FMT24S control systems, rather than from external suppliers. For Feider, it's a classic win-win situation.

INTERNATIONALLY COMPETITIVE

This is not an exclusive deal, of course. In the end, it's the firm that submits the best and most economically advantageous quotation that gets the order. Even more so since Jetter, along with futronic, was acquired by the Swiss Bucher Industries Group. In 2013, this technology group – whose headquarters are in Niederwenigen, not far from Zurich – acquired a majority share in the Ludwigsburg firm, which was subsequently incorporated into its Bucher Specials division. Amongst other things, the division makes wine production equipment as well as processing machinery and technologies for fruit juice, beer and

instant products – and also control solutions for automation systems. Feider explains that, although cooperation between the Group's various companies is explicitly encouraged by the top management and, unsurprisingly, quite a few close relationships have grown over the years, "it's a basic rule that each individual firm must be competitive and capable of standing its own in the international arena".

INSOURCING IS A TOP PRIORITY

The takeover opened up completely new horizons, not least for futronic. For example, insourcing is also a top priority in projects for the beverage industry: the Group's individual companies are urged to take advantage of each other's competencies wherever this is feasible and appropriate. According to project engineer Roland Ebi, futronic is Bucher Unipektin's number one choice as a supplier and project partner. The machines and systems developed and built by the Swiss manufacturer include fruit juice and beer filtration equip-

ment, as a business segment that holds considerable promise. "If ever our own resources – or the time available – become too scarce, futronic is always our first port of call", Ebi insists. "We've got a direct line to them and the chemistry between us is good."

COLLABORATIVE PLATFORM

Under this cross-border cooperation arrangement, colleagues from Lake Constance take care of, say, the electrical design and building the control cabinets, and in some projects they're additionally responsible for PLC programming. Specialists from futronic are often also on site at the customer's to assist with commissioning. In some cases, that means travelling to exotic destinations: the two firms are currently working on a beer filtration system for UCB Union Camerounaise de Brasseries, Cameroun's biggest brewery located in Douala. futronic is attending to the hardware planning and supplying an MCC cabinet to this Central African seaport along with several control boxes.

The cooperation works so well that the two companies are now also harmonising their digital infrastructure and setting up interfaces to enable loss-free data transmission as well as compatible

(software) systems. "The idea is to establish a collaborative digital platform," Ebi replies when asked about the underlying strategy. "That way, we can involve futronic's developers in projects even sooner and even more closely." In the opposite direction, futronic will be able to make use of any free resources at Unipektin and harness the resulting synergies.

NEW PATHS TO NEW INDUSTRIES

The Swiss already have a few projects in the pipeline. As one example, futronic will collaborate with colleagues at Unipektin on the implementation of a so-called beer recovery plant for a Russian client. And in another joint endeavour, experts at the two companies plan to cooperate closely with one another on the development of new filtration technology based on shell limestone.

Jetter has meanwhile gone a step further, and has been a successful player in the packaging business for many years. A while ago now, Jetter purchased a form, fill and seal machine, which now stands in a hall at the headquarters where it is used to carry out in-depth analyses and tests. "About 110 firms manufacturing these machines exist in Germany alone," Jetter's

VP Sales & Marketing points out, "and the design is always very similar". Jetter now wants to get together with futronic to develop a control system combining roughly 80 per cent of the total feature set. The aim is to come up with what will de facto be a standard control system that can be used for practically any machine of this kind – with customised solutions for the rest.

Feider puts the strategy in a nutshell: "By doing that, we can bring down the costs for purchasing a form, fill and seal machine significantly, much to the benefit of our customers". The first project with a client in Italy was highly promising and Feider is now hoping to take the market by storm. With futronic on board. ■

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automation

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