Looking to the future

How the vision of the founder of Progroup AG is becoming reality

In 1991, Jürgen Heindl, founder of Progroup AG, had the vision of setting up a sustainable, resource-efficient cardboard production company and becoming a reliable supplier for small and medium-sized businesses. Now, 30 years later, he employs 1,455 people across 16 production sites. In 2020, the company had a turnover of around 881 million euros and opened one of the world’s largest and most modern paper mills in Saxony-Anhalt.

Progroup puts sustainability into practice and environmental protection is part of its corporate philosophy. For around 30 years, the company has been following a high-tech green strategy based on the principles of zero waste and the circular economy that allows it to keep its use of valuable resources to a minimum. In addition, Jürgen Heindl’s vision will be taken forward by the next generation of the family.

Visionary, forward-looking and committed – the values for success

A long-term vision is needed to make a company future-proof. Progroup’s success story shows the impact that careful, sustainable decisions can have, if they are consistently implemented. In 1998, the first paper factory in Burg near Magdeburg in Saxony-Anhalt came into operation. The location was carefully chosen, because the future EU expansion to the east promised to open up new markets. The production site in the heart of central Germany is easily accessible and is now the company’s biggest plant, where its own logistics business is also based.

Unique circulating water treatment system

Another production site was opened in 2020 in Saxony-Anhalt that is one of the largest and most advanced paper mills in the world. In Sandersdorf-Brehna, more than 2,000 metric tons of containerboard can be produced every day using a resource-efficient process. The unique feature of the plant is its environmental protection concept. This involves an innovative circulating water treatment system that has reduced the use of fresh water by 80 percent. The biogas produced by the process is used to dry the paper. The consumption of fossil fuels at the plant in Sandersdorf-Brehna has been kept to a minimum. Out of the total investment of 500 million euros in the project, around 100 million euros was spent on environmental protection measures.

Progroup plays a pioneering role in the global paper and packaging industry with regard to sustainability. The company’s engineers work with technology partners to develop solutions that will revolutionize the paper industry in the long term. For example, the paper machine in Burg has a completely closed water circuit that is the only one of its kind in the world.

Best practices in the circular economy

Progroup is a good example of best practices in the paper industry. For instance, the company puts the emphasis on recycling and a sustainable circular economy in order to make efficient use of raw materials and resources. For the production of containerboard with resource-efficient paper machines, 100% recycled paper is used. The resulting cardboard goes to customers in the packaging industry and every box returns to the production process via the paper recycling system.

Sustainable and efficient solutions are being developed in Saxony-Anhalt for a range of industries. In particular in the field of plant and machinery, concepts are being created that are economically, environmentally and socially progressive and in the interests of future generations. The visionary and innovative environment consisting of universities, research institutes, hidden champions and technology leaders makes the state an attractive location for successful investments. For this reason, it is no surprise that, after more than 20 years in the region, Progroup decided to open another site here. According to the company, another advantage of the location is the pool of highly skilled employees. The two Progroup sites now employ around 400 people.

“As a family company we take our social and environmental responsibilities very seriously,” says Maximilian Heindl, son of the company founder and deputy CEO of Progroup. As a father, it is important to him to develop the company on a long-term basis and to plan for the generations to come. A number of measures are being taken to ensure that the company’s attractive employer credentials are noticed. As well as creating highly-modern, attractive working environments, it also supports good causes in the region, such as the junior fire department.

Anyone who knows the history of the company will not be surprised that Jürgen Heindl has been preparing for several years for the next generation of the family to take over. His son Maximilian, who has been a member of the board since 2017, will take over responsibility for the management of the company at the end of 2022. “We put the right measures in place early on to ensure that the family business will develop successfully over the long term. Our goal is to continue to maintain our market position in the long term with our business model, and to grow at the same pace as our partners and customers. The close connection across the generations guarantees the continuity and reliability of Progroup as a strong partner,” says CEO Jürgen Heindl. The main focus is on developing the company, which now has 13 sites throughout Europe.

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