



Nothing comes off the shelf

The Elektromotorenwerk Dessau delivers its plants to over 70 countries around the world.

Reiner Storch is the essence of calmness. Over the last twenty-plus years, he has survived several lean periods with his company and successfully overcome the turbulences of the financial and economic crisis. "The motivation of our employees and their experience have paid off – they are worth their weight in gold to us", stated the Managing Director of the AEM–Anhaltische Elektromotorenwerk Dessau GmbH Company. He perceives these factors as the company's most important capital. Moreover, there is also a well balanced mix between older and younger colleagues. He is convinced that a company can only benefit from the different mindsets and approaches, the mutual learning processes.

Figures speak an impressive language at AEM. More than 60 years of experience in the field of electromechanical engineering at the Dessau location have proved to be an excellent basis. With its current total of around 230 employees, the company has established itself as a special-purpose machine constructor for three-phase alternating current motors and three-phase generators for drive solutions as well as for energy generation. Included in its manufacturing spectrum are generators for water power and shipbuilding as well as motors for mining, hoisting and construction machinery as well as test beds. Since its founding in 1993 via a management buy-out (MBO), AEM has more than tripled its turnover with an average export share of 60 percent. In this period, the company has delivered more than 12,00 machines to over 70 countries all over the world. They are to be found in plants in Norway, Sweden, China, India, Singapore and Brazil. "This makes me rather proud", states Reiner Storch. This year, he is counting on a turnover of around 20 million Euros.

It would never have occurred to him after completing his study at the Technical University in Leipzig that an engineer would one day run a company as its manager. Storch began his career in 1982 as a young graduate in the construction department of the state-owned Elektromotorenwerk Dessau. He subsequently move to product designing and then to the area of software. "It was an interesting period", recalls the present-day Managing Director. "In those days, a major part of the motors and generators went for export, mainly to countries in the Comecon area (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance). Air-conditioning systems for refrigerated transports in the Soviet Union, cement plants or cranes relied just as much on the Dessau technology as ocean-going vessels. "Often, however, we had no idea of the paths our products took", he concluded. After all, the state enjoyed a monopoly in foreign trade and was not always willing to reveal their hand.

The political transformation in East Germany on the fall of the Berlin Wall heralded the onset of a bumpy road for many companies in the traditional engineering sector in Saxony-Anhalt. The location, with a long tradition behind it (electric motors had been built there since 1948), was up for grabs. Even a closure did not appear out of the question at that time. The powerful engineering collective combine (VEM) based in Dresden – with a total of some 33,000 employees in 15 enterprises in the whole of East Germany in the period of the planned economy – re-oriented itself, sought new perspectives for the individual locations. With the courage born of desperation, four employees from the company, including Reiner Storch, dared to tread the path of privatisation. "We possessed the will to retain this location. We were aware that we could draw on good products and a magnificent team", was his personal résumé. By 1995, a veritable feat had been achieved.

For an investment totalling almost eleven million Euros, a completely new plant sprang up from nothing, the first employees were recruited. "It was our aim from the very beginning to be competitive with our own products and not merely be a subcontractor for the industry", reported the Managing director. All the steps involved in the production – ranging from planning, via manufacture and assembly through to control at our own in-house test bed – ensue solely at the Dessau location down to the present day. In the initial years, it was a question of finding new buyers, opening up hitherto untapped markets. AEM was practically unknown – particularly in the West. The concept of setting up a strong research and development department to especially act on customer orders proved a success. "Thus we can react to each of their requirements in a tailor-made manner", according to Storch. For example, Dessau generators are to be found in emergency power systems, in cogeneration units or in decentralised energy-generating systems. Conveyor and excavator gears rely on motors just as much as crane systems or pumps. Water-jacketed cooled examples are particularly used in shipbuilding. "None of the individual pieces or small batch series would come off the shelf or out of the construction box", he continued. "In order to create this, every fifth employee in the company is an engineer". As a result of the commercial success, it was possible to raise another 13 million Euros in order to construct new plants and acquire new technology. Reiner Storch contently talks of further investment plans. For example, a new test bed is planned for the foreseeable future, for the construction of which the Dessau company intends to buy a property directly neighbouring the company's premises.

The story of AEM is shared by many companies in the mechanical engineering sector in Saxony-Anhalt. Following the structural changes of, first and foremost, the collective combines in the former East German as well as other major companies in the 1990s, healthy growth cores emerged. Today every tenth employee in the economy of Saxony-Anhalt works in this sector. The mechanical engineering industry generates some five percent of the total economic turnover in Saxony-Anhalt.

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