

Way2K: Interview between VDMA and Markus Gschwandtner

The Possibilities of Cross-Company Digitalization

In the lead-up to K 2022, the trade fair for the plastics and rubber industry in Düsseldorf, Germany, Markus Gschwandtner, CEO of Brückner Servtec GmbH, talks about the advantages of digitalization for predictive maintenance and for the circular economy.



On the digital service platform the documentation is available online at any time. © Brückner

Mr. Gschwandtner, your company has to ensure that Brückner film lines run trouble-free at customer sites. What role does digitalization play in this operation?

→ Digitalization is of crucial importance to us as the interface between Brückner and the customer, which is why we continuously drive forward integration and exchange of data and information. To this end, we have set up a digital service platform where the customer can

access our services online. Let me give you an example: the delivery scope of a plant includes extensive documentation. Up until now, it has always consisted of many folders. If the customer wanted some information, it could take a while to find the relevant passages. On our service platform, this documentation is now available online at any time. The service technician standing in front of the machine then has easy and quick

access to the necessary information via a tablet or smartphone.

Consequently, access to information is becoming easier. What other advantages are there?

→ The fundamental advantages are transparency and simplicity. Here is another example: we install about 30,000 parts in each machine. Many of these are labelled with a QR code, including parts

from suppliers. It identifies each component from the beginning of its life with Brückner until it is used at the customer's site. All customers need to do is scan the part they want to replace; both we and the customer then know exactly which part is concerned and when it will be available. This allows us to react much more quickly and, if necessary, to fix a problem much sooner.

Many companies hesitate when it comes to handing over data. How do you convince them?

→ We have to ensure that the data is truly secure. At our company, there are no leaks. We are TÜV-certified. But that assurance alone isn't enough to convince a customer; the decisive factor is that we need to make sure the customer sees the enormous advantages. The benefits of data integration are the greatest where corporate boundaries are crossed. Over 70 percent of our customers are already on our digital platform. Basically, it's the same principle as a smartphone: you see what's possible with it, and soon after, you find you can't do without it.

Will resources be conserved?

→ Predictive maintenance helps make utilization of the production line and also all subsequent steps more sustainable. For example, if maintenance is carried out without it actually being necessary at the time, spare parts will also be replaced needlessly early. So, you will need a lot more material over the life cycle of a plant. But resources are also conserved if, for example, we install more energy-efficient motors during upgrades and modifications. The goal must be to use as few resources as possible, be it material, energy, or raw materials. Only through digitalization can we achieve the transparency necessary for this purpose.

How are digitalization and the circular economy interrelated?

→ Without digitalization, it would be very difficult to enable a circular economy. With it, however, we can for example label products during the production process. Then machines can recognize later in the waste collection cycle what the packaging film is actually made of. It is then possible to identify that a piece of packaging film is made of



Markus Gschwandtner, CEO of Brückner Servtec GmbH. © Brückner

“The Big Digital Project of the Future Is Predictive Maintenance.”

Markus Gschwandtner

What is the next big digitalization topic?

→ The big digital project of the future is predictive maintenance. When one of our production lines comes to a standstill, the customer loses around 10,000 euros on average in revenue, and that figure is per hour. It is therefore important to keep these stoppages as brief as possible, but in any case, to be able to predict them. We are already well on the way to doing that, installing sensors, for instance, to assess the status of critical components. In the future, we will also use artificial intelligence to predict when a part might break or when maintenance should be carried out. The goal is to increase the ability to plan necessary maintenance work ahead, because that will save considerable costs and increase the production uptime.

polyethylene and does not contain more than five percent different and foreign materials. This means it is fully recyclable. But the production lines have to be prepared. Such mono-material structures require numerous modifications to the plants. Only then can a high-quality plastic packaging film, which is ready for circular economy, be guaranteed.

What's the next phase in the circular economy?

→ With regard to packaging films, circular economy can only work if we aim for mono-material structures. But it is also important to have a better collection system for plastics, comparable to that for bottles. It must be made as simple as possible for the consumer. Next, the plastic has to be separated so that you get single-source plastics. The next step

is single-source recycling. But then there is the question of what to use the recycle for. Turning a packaging film back into a packaging film remains a vision for the time being but turning recycled packaging film into good products that can be used in injection molding, for example, would make sense.

What are the major challenges?

→ The technical challenges will be overcome. It will be more difficult to implement a viable collection system. And then it is important that the circular economy is established all over the world. A lot is collected in Germany or Austria, but not so much yet elsewhere in Europe and in many other parts of the world. The quantities are still too small for the circular economy to be economically viable. That has to change, too. ■

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