

Beckhoff Belgium: Sales increase and EtherCAT technology as door opener

Three years after it was established, the Belgian Beckhoff subsidiary, which is based in Hasselt, can already look back on a record of success. Despite the current global economic crisis, Patrick Gielis, Managing Director of Beckhoff Belgium, and his team of 8 managed to gain a number of new customers, so that the 2008 sales figures are expected to increase by 10 to 15 percent this year.

When Beckhoff moved into premises on the Research Campus at the former Philips production site in Hasselt in September 2006, the team consisted of the managing director, a support engineer and a sales assistant. The committed team managed to establish a considerable customer base within a relatively short space of time. The main industry sectors in Belgium are the automotive industry and its suppliers, the process industry, and the tobacco and food industry. "We started with the aim of gaining new customers from the mechanical engineering sector, and this is what we have achieved," said Managing Director Patrick Gielis. This year Beckhoff Belgium achieved an increase in the number of customers by 20 percent compared with 2008.

Established in all areas of PC-based automation

Beckhoff Belgium has a broad customer profile, and Beckhoff technology is used in a wide range of sectors. The focus is on machine construction OEM customers in a wide range of fields, including packaging, PCB production, tobacco processing, food production, and metal working. Build-

ing automation has emerged as another important business area. A system integrator who specializes in building automation in retirement homes is one of the largest customers of the Belgian Beckhoff branch. Close cooperation with system integrators is a key characteristic of the structure of the Belgian automation market.

Beckhoff has made a name for itself in Belgium as a supplier of complete solutions. "However, there are also examples where we act solely as supplier of Industrial PCs," said Patrick Gielis, commenting on the range of customer requirements.

Positive image thanks to reliable support and marketing

According to Patrick Gielis, the success of the Belgian team is based on its good support service: "In Belgium we have an image of a technology company. We not only promise a solution, but support our customers as long as it takes to ensure that everything runs smoothly. We now have three support engineers who provide this service."

Patrick Gielis, Managing Director of Beckhoff Belgium: "The EtherCAT technology is a 'door opener' in the acquisition of new customers. EtherCAT is not only fast, but also easy to wire up; it is inexpensive and can be combined almost arbitrarily with third-party EtherCAT components."





Beckhoff Belgium is also engaged in intensive marketing through contact with the main Belgian trade magazines, presence at all relevant trade fairs and by offering so-called study days and roadshows. "In this way, we not only strengthen the relationship with our customers, we also welcome the emerging network among our customers," said Patrick Gielis.

Future-oriented with EtherCAT technology

According to Patrick Gielis, EtherCAT technology is a "door opener" for gaining new customers. Beckhoff benefits from the fact that everyone is talking about EtherCAT, which is regarded as the future for automation. EtherCAT is not only fast, but also easy to wire and cost-effective. "In addition, our products offer a high degree of flexibility for combination with EtherCAT components from third-party manufacturers," said Patrick Gielis. "Customers therefore no longer require convincing in this respect, while the situation with regard to the less well-known XFC is still different," explains Patrick Gielis. "We therefore offer seminars and training

sessions in order to convey the benefits of this very fast control technology to our customers."

Close networking with colleges and universities

The Belgian branch office not only offers regular training for its customers, it also cooperates closely with technical colleges, polytechnics and universities. "I regard our efforts to familiarize young technicians and engineers with our control philosophy and our components as a good investment in the future," said Patrick Gielis. He considers the Belgian Beckhoff subsidiary to be well positioned for further growth: "We will continue our efforts in the mechanical engineering sector and also increasingly focus on building automation."

Beckhoff Belgium www.beckhoff.be

Kenan Aktaş, Area Sales Manager at Beckhoff headquarters in Verl, Germany: "Beckhoff Belgium offers a wealth of technical know-how and competence, and the team is highly motivated. We have a very close working relationship and in many cases we get involved with potential customers at a very early stage, in order to provide customized technical support."



Team meeting at headquarters of Beckhoff Belgium on the Research Campus in Hasselt, the former Philips production site: (from left) Johnny Vangeel (Sales), Patrick Gielis (Managing Director, Beckhoff Belgium), Bert Cuypers (Technical Support and Service) and Ronny Noynaert (Sales)