

BECKHOFF

Mit Beckhoff in die Zukunft



Beckhoff Switzerland: Gerhard Meier hands over management duties to René Zuberbühler

During a customer event held by Beckhoff Automation AG Switzerland on September 4, 2015 at the historic Dolder Grand hotel in Zurich, Gerhard Meier officially handed over the management of the company to his successor, René Zuberbühler. Around 100 guests were in attendance for the occasion, among them representatives from 50 large Swiss customers.

Gerhard Meier established Beckhoff Switzerland more than 15 years ago, successfully serving as Managing Director during this time. Recently, Meier handed over the reins to his successor, René Zuberbühler at the Dolder Grand hotel, which the company helped revamp and modernize 10 years ago. At the time, Beckhoff Switzerland implemented a very advanced control system with the help of another solutions provider; the project involved more than 280 Embedded PCs and 25,000 Bus Terminals. "It was a very interesting, but also challenging project, as it was highly demanding for all parties involved," said Gerhard Meier. "The baton handover event was probably my most relaxed visit to the Dolder Grand to-date."

In 1995, Gerhard Meier made his first contacts with the German Beckhoff headquarters office at an industrial trade show, from which the opportunity arose for him to establish Beckhoff representation in Switzerland. Even though today it is hard to imagine life without PC-based control technology, at the time it was rather "exotic" and required pioneering effort. "In the early days, it wasn't always easy to convey the benefits of PC-based control technology to traditional users," noted Meier. "However, a significant advantage was the fact that Swiss machine manufacturers tend to use very sophisticated automation technology. Even back in 1995, PC-based control was clearly superior to conventional technologies, thanks to the high-performance Lightbus fiber optic communication and TwinCAT software with motion control. The ability to make equipment and machine positioning faster and more accurate was the decisive factor for many early Swiss customers."

Based on rapid positive sales development, Beckhoff Automation AG Switzerland was established in 1999 as the first business subsidiary outside Germany. The opening of the Yverdon office and the entry into the marketplace in western Switzerland followed two years later. This was an important milestone, because it enabled the company to optimally serve customers in their own local language. Further branch and sales offices followed in Zurich, Lyssach and Losone.

Since 1999, Beckhoff has attracted many new customers across Switzerland, resulting in sustained growth. Between 1999 and 2015, annual sales rose from 2 million euros to 23 million, and the number of employees increased from 3 to the current number of 30.

After his retirement as Managing Director, Gerhard Meier will continue to act as chairman of the board of Beckhoff Switzerland and will support key customer projects for a period of two years. In addition, he will continue to be involved in the further expansion of the CNC center of excellence for machine tools in Switzerland. "Understanding a CNC machine requires knowledge in electronics, mechanics, drive technology, software and NC programming," said Meier. "I was able to make very good use of this expertise I acquired in general automation technology during my time at Beckhoff."



Let us take a look at the future of the company.

What can customers expect?

René Zuberbühler: Beckhoff has a major presence at five different locations in Switzerland. Thanks to our decentralized structure, we have established a strong market position. To me, it is important that we continue to expand and strengthen local support for our customers in Switzerland. In addition to more customer visits, we can achieve this through customer events such as Automation UpDate seminars. Local support means close proximity and, therefore, short response times to answer requests from customers. Our offices have sufficient reserve capacity and potential for growth and further expansion. We want to continue exploiting this potential to provide comprehensive support for our customers. In 2016, we will focus particularly on motion and CNC business opportunities.

What are the special demands arising from Switzerland as a marketplace from your perspective?

René Zuberbühler: Swiss companies need the latest technologies in order to succeed in the global marketplace. Machines made in Switzerland will be competitive if they can offer shorter cycle times, better control quality, higher precision and top-quality, premium design. For Swiss companies, the priority is not to buy the cheapest product, but to optimize the complete development and production process and the whole life cycle of a machine.

The high availability of machinery is critical, which is the primary reason why the global presence of Beckhoff international support is so strong. The high costs associated with the maintenance of legacy con-

trol systems continue to move Swiss customers to open, PC-based solutions. This same PC-based control philosophy also happens to serve as the optimal foundation to implement highly-connected Industry 4.0 concepts. There is high demand for industrial solutions that can be easily serviced remotely. Customers are also seeking scalable solutions with as few required interfaces as possible in order to promote seamless control systems – all in a complete package presented at an attractive price point.

What is your «recipe for success» for the next 20 years of Beckhoff Switzerland?

René Zuberbühler: We must be available to support our customers whenever and wherever needed while finding new ways to differentiate ourselves. Our goal is to inspire customers and position ourselves as an expert automation team. Our products are unique, as is our staff. Ultimately, it is the people who make the difference. By harnessing this “people power”, I expect Beckhoff Switzerland to maintain sales increase percentages in the double digit range for the foreseeable future.” says René Zuberbühler. Mutually-beneficial business relationships and cooperation based on reliable partnerships are essential for the success of our customers and for us. Productivity gains are needed in all areas, and we will always support our customers in the most demanding and challenging projects.



René Zuberbühler,
Managing Director, Beckhoff Switzerland

Further information:

www.beckhoff.ch