The Beckhoff subsidiary in France officially commenced operations on February 1, 2005. General Manager, Rombaut Keta and his team have been committed to popularizing PC-based control in the French automation market ever since. In an interview with Jean-Sebastien Scandella, editor of Jautomatise, Rombaut Keta talks about the business growth in recent years and his subsidiary’s outlook for the future.

You can look back on a successful decade as the General Manager of the French Beckhoff subsidiary. Nevertheless, it must not have been easy to penetrate the French market with “Made in Germany” technology.

Rombaut Keta: You are correct. Back then, the French automation market was dominated by hardware PLCs, and PC-based controllers were certainly a rarity. On the other hand, we did not have to start at “zero” in terms of Beckhoff brand awareness in the French marketplace. Jeambrun Automation started selling Beckhoff components in 1999, but not with high expectations for immediate success. And since France, as Germany’s largest European trading partner, was and still is a significant market for Beckhoff, Hans Beckhoff decided to open an official subsidiary in France and asked me to manage it. It was quite a challenge, but we posted sales of almost 1 million euros the first year – with only three employees. We have grown steadily ever since, both in terms of personnel (now 19) and office locations. Needless to say, we also accumulated plenty of expertise over the years. Today, the PC-based control philosophy from Beckhoff has become firmly established in France. But, most importantly, our first customers continue to put their trust in us and in our technology.
On what do you base the success of Beckhoff in France?

Rombaut Keta: What sets Beckhoff apart is our innovative technology, which is based on four pillars: (a) TwinCAT automation software at the center of the controller, (b) the Industrial PC as the standard hardware platform on which all automation functions run, including motion control, robotics, and measurement technology, (c) our universal I/O Terminals, and (d) our Drive Technology. And since our solution is more open, more flexible, and more scalable than comparable solutions, it provides our customers with significant competitive advantages.

With the very successful development of EtherCAT, Beckhoff has set another milestone in automation technology. In many industries, this fast, Ethernet-based communication system has become an accepted standard because of its openness, high performance, and reliability.

At the center of the Beckhoff control philosophy is the idea that hardware components can be replaced with software functionalities. This simplifies the control system architecture and the engineering, while improving system communication, and reducing costs.

What is your outlook for Beckhoff France in the coming years?

Rombaut Keta: In France, we are aiming for sales of 10 million euros in 2015. Our core business continues to be manufacturing systems engineering, but we are working hard to gain market share in other industries where our technology is highly beneficial, such as measuring systems, building automation, and infrastructure projects.

We continue on a course of expansion, both in terms of personnel and office locations. To provide our customers with the best possible service and support, we have opened a sales office in Metz-Tessy (2012) and a technical office in Bras-sur-Meuse (2013), with more locations to follow in 2015.

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Further information:
www.beckhoff.fr