

Anniversary year

futronic turns 40 – a genuine success story

Today, futronic is one of the world's top suppliers in the field of complex automation and drive solutions for the glass container industry. It all began with an order from the food processing sector. Four decades ago in 1972, Gerhard Funk and his partners Günther Scharpf and Horst Dieter Reinsch laid the foundation for futronic GmbH in a back room in Tettngang. We'd like to celebrate this important anniversary with a look back at the company's 40-year success story.



A strong team: With premium quality products, longstanding relationships and first-class service futronic goes into future.

As soon as Wolfgang Lachmann is prompted to recollect the past and futronic's early years, his eyes light up visibly. Although Lachmann, who today is responsible for the running of the company together with Michael Preuß, only joined the team in 1988, he was involved in numerous collaborative ventures prior to that

date in his role as software developer at Oberland Glas (now Saint-Gobain Oberland AG). He has kept up his friendship with Gerhard Funk, futronic's founder and namesake who withdrew from active business life in 1986.

A little lost in thought, Lachmann turns the pages of a few old brochures – personal co-

pies, some with handwritten notes, that have survived the years and been preserved for posterity. Then he starts to tell the story. Lachmann: „In the beginning, futronic had nothing at all to do with glass production.“ The very first orders were received from the meat processing industry. According to



Photographs from days gone by: futronic founders Gerhard Funk (left), General Manager with responsibility for sales, and Production Manager Günther Scharpf.

Father of the MP-ST: Horst Dieter Reinsch, once Technical Manager at futronic.

a company brochure published in 1983, it was 'technical difficulties with a veterinary product' that persuaded a customer to get in touch with futronic. The three founding fathers were able to solve the problem to the customer's satisfaction. More contracts from the food sector followed on the basis of recommendations. From that moment on, things really took off.

„The trio at the helm of that fledgling enterprise were rather ambitious“, Lachmann continues. It wasn't long before orders were also coming in from customers in other industries such as mechanical engineering or medical, lab and process technology. Even teaching aids used to be part of the futronic portfolio. In 1977, futronic got together with Tett nang Electronics College to develop a training system for digital and microprocessor technology. „We're still reaping the benefits of our experience with this and similar projects to this day when it comes to customer and staff training, for instance“, Lachmann observes.

Future-proof technologies

In the spring of 1978, futronic secured its first order to design a control system for glass machines from Oberland Glas in Bad Wurzach. After just four months, its development engineers were able to unveil the MP-ST. „Our machine marked the entry of computer technology into glass production“, Lachmann explains. „Transistor logic and relays were no longer state of the art. The MP-ST proved to be a ground-breaking invention that put us a huge step ahead of the competition.“

The MP-ST paved the way for futronic's success story as a top supplier of automation solutions for the glass container industry. The successor model was launched in the market in 1987: CIMOG stands for „Computer Integrated Manufacturing of Glass“. The CIMOG was the first control system anywhere in the world to facilitate freely programmable special cycles for the production process. The first tandem control for 16-section machines was shipped by futronic later the same year – further evidence of the company's pioneering position in glass industry. A low-cost alternative to the CIMOG was introduced in the early nineties. The EPRO (Economic Production) was designed for smaller plant and machinery that is particularly popular in the Far East and can manage without the CIMOG's high-end functionality. Finally, in 2004, the FMT24S appeared on the market. The FMT (Flexible Modular Timing) is a distributed control system for IS machines with up to 24 sections

that can be tailored to each customer's individual specification. „The aim was to develop a control that could be used for any application“, says Wolfgang Lachmann.

Change at the top

The increasing number of orders put the Tett nang firm on an astounding success trajectory and the payroll was regularly extended to keep pace with its commercial growth. In 1982, futronic moved from Karlstrasse in the town centre to new premises in Schäferhof Industrial Park. The original „garage shop“ had turned into a fully-fledged manufacturer with almost eighty staff. In the meantime, its client base also included agricultural and packaging industry customers. Parallel to this expansion, futronic was gradually becoming more closely involved with the glass industry and intensifying its partnership with Oberland.



1972



futronic GmbH established in Tett nang by Gerhard Funk

1978

First MP-ST enters into service

1982

Move to new premises in Schäferhof Industrial Park

1986

futronic becomes a subsidiary of Oberland Glas AG in Bad Wurzach

1987

futronic presents the CIMOG as the successor to the MP-ST

1992

Expansion of the Schäferhof facility

»Title

In 1986, the Bad Wurzach glass specialist made a takeover bid that was too good to refuse and futronic became a subsidiary of Oberland Glas AG. The founding fathers stepped down and Bernt Küstner, for many years head of Oberland's electrical workshop (see interview), was named as General Manager, with Lachmann following him on board as Technical Manager a short while later. Küstner guided the company through a turbulent period – with considerable success. For a time the motto was „shrink to survive“, but within only a few years the company was back on the road to growth and prosperity. Space on the Schäferhof site became scarce and in 1992 the facility had to be extended.

After 18 years in charge, Bernt Küstner decided to pass on the baton. In 2004, Michael Preuß, who arrived at futronic as a development engineer in 1987, and Wolfgang Lachmann were appointed joint Managing Directors. On January 1, 2006, Oberland – meanwhile owned by Saint-Gobain, the French conglomerate – sold futronic to Jetter AG in Ludwigsburg nearby Stuttgart.

Excellently equipped for the future

Preuß, Managing Director with responsibility for sales and distribution, and Lachmann, answerable for Development & Technology, steered the company to a record profit in 2008 and helped it come through the recession intact twelve months later. During this time, futronic successfully strengthened and enlarged its Industrial Automation division. In 2008, the company moved to a new building complex in Bürgermoos Industrial Park. Today, futronic employs 61 staff who support around 900 installations worldwide. Among the customers of its Industrial Automation division are numerous enterprises like Zeppelin Systems, Liebherr, KTW K.Weishaupt and ZF Friedrichshafen.

„When we develop a new drive and control concept, it's not just a question of staying one step ahead technology-wise“, Lachmann muses. „We also have to live up to our clients' high expectations with regard to reliability, durability and efficiency.“ Lachmann is convinced that this „blend of premium quality products, longstanding relationships, proximity to customers and first-class service is the secret of futronic's success – now and in the future.“

»Interview

An interview with: Bernt Küstner

„futronic was a smash hit!“

Bernt Küstner, a native of Lübeck, North Germany, joined Oberland Glas in Bad Wurzach in 1973 after apprenticeship, engineering degree and initial work experience. As General Manager of futronic he introduced some radical changes that paved the way to global leadership. He withdrew after 18 years, worked as consultant and is now enjoying his retirement. Mr. Küstner recalls a fascinating period spent in Tettmang.

futronic Journal: Mr. Küstner, you know futronic like the back of your hand. What brought you to the company in the first place?

Bernt Küstner: I first got to hear about futronic when I was head of the electrical workshop at Oberland. We were planning to modernise our facility with the aim of improving working conditions at the machines and optimising our processes. Microprocessor technology was just beginning to take off and seemed to hold a lot of promise. We couldn't find anything suitable on the market, which is why we decided to develop what we were looking for ourselves. It was while we were searching for the best partner for this project that we hit on futronic. **futronic Journal:** At the time, futronic was a small, unknown company located in a back room in Tettmang. What made you so confident that you'd found the perfect partner?

Küstner: It was clear to me right away that the know-how was there, and Gerhard Funk had the courage to invest in this bold idea with us. futronic developed the MP-ST in just four months. We then tested this innovative control system extensively at Oberland – and were extremely impressed with the results. The MP-ST was subsequently installed in our machines at sites not only in Germany but worldwide. futronic was a smash hit!

futronic Journal: In 1986, you were appointed General Manager of futronic. What are your memories of the early years?

Küstner: Well, the MP-ST sold very well and the company was booming. Unfortunately, the management was lulled by the heady flight into biting off more than it could chew. Oberland bought up futronic on July 1, 1986 in order to protect our know-how and technology lead,



three months before I arrived in September. Minor few job cuts were our only option to start with. They provided us with the freedom to realign the product portfolio to the glass industry, develop new controls and drives and gradually give the company a complete facelift. By the end of 1988, we were out of the red and back to break-even. I'd like to emphasise that we only succeeded because we all pulled together. I was careful never to forget the people behind the numbers. It considered it very important always to have a sympathetic ear for my staff. In spite of that, those were really turbulent – not to say stormy – times.

futronic Journal: You were succeeded in 2004 by Mr. Lachmann and Mr. Preuß. Was that a difficult legacy?

Küstner: No. They've both grown into their management roles and their technical expertise is in any case beyond dispute. It was only logical that they should follow me as Managing Directors. I'm in no doubt whatsoever that futronic will continue to go its own way and develop plenty more innovative products and projects.

1997

futronic is awarded a QM certificate according to DIN EN ISO 9001

2001

futronic is awarded QM certificates according to DIN EN ISO 9001:2000 and DIN EN ISO 14001:1996



2004

futronic launches the new FMT24S IS machine control



2004

General Manager Bernt Küstner goes into retirement and is succeeded by Michael Preuss and Wolfgang Lachmann