

RIED-ECHO

Leader in a global niche market

Company portrait: Sandner-Messtechnik develops and produces test equipment for acquiring physical properties.

BIEBESHEIM. Measuring physical properties electronically because they can no longer be verified mechanically is one of the tasks that Sandner-Messtechnik GmbH has set for itself. These properties might be used to determine the fatigue limit of a new steel alloy, for example. "Today everything must go smoother and quicker", explains entrepreneur Rudolf Sandner. "The sooner the characteristics of a new material can be found the better". Material tests are accelerated with the help of measuring and test instruments, and they are also used in research.

Rudolf Sandner founded Messtechnik GmbH with headquarters in the Biebesheim industrial park in 1988. He was already producing test instruments as a sideline in 1980. The toolmaker, born in 1944, started with one employee. Since that time his workforce has grown continuously. Today there are 22 employees, including two interns, one apprentice and two part-time employees. Sandner's son Thorsten, an electrical engineering graduate who specialized in control engineering, also participates actively in the business. Daughter Melanie handles business matters.

The company specializes in a global niche market and combines development and production under one roof. Besides test equipment and servo-hydraulics, extensometers are one of the company's key products. They can be used to measure deformations with a precision of one ten thousandth of a millimeter. There are about 400 variants of these devices. The company's entire product line encompasses 4000 products.

In 1997 some business areas were exported to the affiliated company Fertigungstechnologie ["Production Technology"] managed by Thorsten Sandner. The two companies work hand in hand, however. Another business is run together with a partner.

With the founding of Fertigungstechnologie, production area was expanded from 300 to 700 square meters. Since then a climate-controlled test laboratory has also been added. Sandner's customers include companies from the dental and medical technology field as well as the chemical and paint and dye industries. Other customers include research centers of colleges and universities.

Names of the company's products a mystery to the lay person

It is not until one visits the laboratory and production hall that things become clear. For example, that is where a continuous-flow heater is produced that is about three centimeters long and just a few millimeters in diameter. Its application is in medical technology. Precision is also required in the production of applicator frames used to apply micrometer-thick paint layers.

Its larger products include hydrostatic servo-cylinders that are used in material stress testing. The automotive industry utilizes the devices to shorten test phases. Tests can be performed in the shortest possible time, explains operations manager Gregor Roncka. The company from Biebesheim also supplied servo-valves for the hydraulic cylinders used in stress tests of the Airbus 380.

A current contract project with a university in northern Hessen involves earthquake research. "We are supplying all of the hardware for the earthquake simulation", reports Rudolf Sandner. This hardware, said to be capable of exerting up to 400 kilonewtons in multiple axes, might be used to stress a high-rise building model, for example, and thereby simulate a number of earthquake scenarios in the laboratory.

Because its products, and hence its orders, are all quite diverse, employees must possess expert knowledge and be flexible. "At our company everybody does everything", says Sandner senior. The company's business success is nothing short of "dazzling". The number of booked orders is enormous, and 30 to 40 percent of orders come from foreign countries, reveals Sandner Junior. The company delivers products to the USA, Asia, Mexico and Russia.

By Diana Rothermel