

# Digital expertise to match traditional screen printing strengths

When 85% of Kammann Maschinenfabrik was acquired by KBA in 2013, it could have been the case that the business would lose its identity within the larger KBA Group. According to Dr Christian Maas, however, almost three years later, this is certainly not the case, as the hollow glass screen printing machinery specialist builds on previous successes, while also introducing the latest digital technology.



Claus-Bolza-Schünemann, President of the KVA Group.

The KAMMANN name has been synonymous with the supply of high quality equipment for the decoration of hollow containers made from glass, plastic and metal since the mid-1950s. In 2010, the company re-emerged from financial restructuring following the purchase of tangible assets by a combination of the company management and a Munich-based private equity firm.

Then, in July 2013, Koenig & Bauer (KBA) acquired 85% of the business, with the existing management team of Matthias Graf and Christian Maas retaining the remaining 15% stake.

Founded in 1817, the Koenig & Bauer Group is the world's second largest press manufacturer, offering a broad product range to the global media industry. Faced with difficult conditions in its traditional markets, however, KBA determined an acquisition strategy in 'promising print segments' to expand its position in the diversified packaging market. The first example to date of this strategy is the KAMMANN acquisition.

## STABILITY AND INNOVATION

According to Christian Maas, although many customers only became aware of the KBA name following the creation of KBA-KAMMANN GmbH almost three years ago, they recognised the benefits of stabilising the KAMMANN business from strategic and risk management perspectives. "Our connection to KBA has only upgraded

customers' perceptions of the brand" he maintains. In essence, the alliance has provided long-term stability and increased investment in development research, combined importantly with accelerated innovation and the provision of greater resources.

"We are aligning our R&D activities with those of other business divisions within the KBA group, mainly but not exclusively in the digital printing area" Dr Maas explains. "This is a cross division task, so it's going beyond what we do as KAMMANN. We are now fully integrated into KBA and our work is synchronised with other members of the group to develop common solutions."

In the digital printing arena especially, there are understood to be numerous opportunities for the cross-fertilisation of knowledge within the KBA Group. "The bare minimum we do is share information, before possibly growing into closer collaboration and joint developments" Christian Maas explains. "There are many possibilities for the future."

## IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY

Although KBA-KAMMANN is described as a small German entity, it is similar to the KBA group as a whole in being affected by economic business cycles in Europe especially. Overall, the portfolio has been stabilised and consolidated, a move that joint Managing Director, Christian Maas believes was necessary. "Since introducing the K15 CNC platform five years ago, we are now in a position to build on it and to expand into other fields as well. It's good to have the capacity to do other things but also to optimise the platform strategy for certain applications, eg integrated productivity systems, which have become an important field and a source of customer demand... machines with higher speeds and more integrated into factory production lines, less manual feed and material flow, integrated into automated lines such as palletisers, depalletisers and other industrial systems."

KBA-KAMMANN has focused on opening interfaces, while installing and implementing inspection and quality control systems. And such innovations as automated ink supply and 'check and qualify production inline' are now available. "In addition, of course, the reliability and ability of the overall systems are important factors... the more components you put into the line, the more issues faced that can be disruptive to productivity."

Furthermore, the company has recorded increased >



Matthias Graf, joint Managing Director, KBA-KAMMANN.



Dr Christian Maas, joint Managing Director, KBA-KAMMANN.

KBA-KAMMANN manufactures decorating machines for cosmetic packaging, large glass bottles, drinking glasses and laboratory glassware.



in Shanghai to serve the important Chinese market, for example, where customers can see one of the company's decorating machines in operation.

The hollow glass industry continues to represent the largest proportion of sales (60%), followed by plastic and metal packaging. Europe and in particular Germany remains KBA-KAMMANN'S most successful market, followed by the USA, with Japan showing signs of improvement. "We are a global company" says Dr Maas, "with the ability to react to local market requirements."

Where beneficial, existing KBA international sales network resources are being utilised, although it takes time to make such fundamental changes. "We can't immediately switch everything from a KAMMANN sales team to a KBA sales team because the market and customers are too different."

**DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY**

Since introducing digital technology at the K-Show and glasstec 2012, the company has made positive progress, selling several machines on the K1 and K15 platforms. "It's good to have this technology available, with everyone asking what's new and what can be done; the option of digital technology has evolved into a prominent item on our discussion agenda with customers" Christian Maas explains. "It opens up new prospects into different markets. Digital and plastics are a very good fit but the glass industry can be more conservative and the inkjet process is possibly more difficult to implement successfully but we are getting ahead there too. Some major players that have bought our digital technology will soon be demonstrating some very interesting results. There are already sales in plastics and glass but customers like to keep a low profile in these early initial steps with such new technology!"

All KBA-KAMMANN high productivity systems are still based on screen printing technology. The company recently commissioned a production line at an Indian glass customer that is running 110 pieces per minute with UV. And in the USA, a machine has been installed that operates in double-up mode at 200 pieces per minute. "Both are screen printing-based, which indicates that screen technology and conventional print technologies come into play when people want to go high speed with mass production in high quantities" says Dr Maas. "Digital is not the right thing to do in these areas... screen is preferred."

The addition of digital alongside screen technology in the same portfolio allows KBA-KAMMANN to offer more solutions to customers who recognise the possibilities of combined machines and equipment that can be used for screen and digital decoration, so they have a fallback solution, offering safe production. "Screen and digital can offer special values to each other and may help to create a unique product" Christian Maas concludes. ■

investment in R&D since the KBA acquisition. "We took advantage of several inspiring ideas within the KBA world – exchanging information and learning from others is an important feature within the group" Dr Maas confirms. "We attend regular KBA management meetings and as well as monthly reporting, there are high level quarterly reviews."

**RECOGNISED BRAND**

It is planned to retain the autonomous KAMMANN name and continue to operate the business from its existing location in Bad Oeynhausen, Germany. Some 140 people are employed at the site, including 20 apprentices, as well as a further 20 people in other parts of the world. A subsidiary has been opened



Matthias Graf and Dr Christian Maas, joint Managing Directors of KBA-Kammann.

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