



A NEW MACHINE INTERACTION



DIGITAL



PLENTY OF SPACE FOR CREATIVITY



KARL-RUDOLF HOPT

Owner and CEO
ddm hopt+schuler GmbH & Co. KG



STEFAN PROBST

Materials Management Manager
ddm hopt+schuler GmbH & Co. KG

Not all companies have managed to keep pace with change as impressively as ddm hopt+schuler. The company based in the German town of Rottweil has succeeded in continuously developing itself and its products for more than 50 years. The key to success, according to owner Karl-Rudolf Hopt, is a "a culture in which nothing is impossible".



SYSTEMS COMPONENTS SOLUTIONS

200
patents

12
million products
a year

0
CO₂-emissions

Optical 2-bit incremental encoder with Touch Sense function of the 580 series

DIGITAL

In all likelihood, a great number of people have held a ddm hopt+schuler product in their hands, touched it or used it without knowing it. Located 80 kilometers southwest of Stuttgart, the company with its 210 employees manufactures card readers, encoders and ticketing systems. They are then used, in payment applications, for example, in kiosk systems or at e-charging stations. When you go to the bakery in the morning and ask if you can "please pay by card", you are often handed expertise produced in Rottweil over the counter. First came punch cards, then came the magnetic strip, the chip card and eventually RFID technology – in other words, ddm hopt+schuler has had to reinvent itself four times. The ability to change is therefore a fundamental part of the company's culture. These days, 12 million products are shipped around the world every year. Owner and Managing Director Karl-Rudolf Hopt is fond of describing his company as a "creative technologist". Hopt: "Thanks to our craftsmanship, we have the opportunity not only to dream up the future and innovations, but also to implement these ideas in a very practical way. Creativity stems from a variety of skills. We are closely meshed, we work together flexibly and across departments."

"The confidence we have in ourselves enables us to be creative."

Stefan Probst appreciates this open mindset that excludes a silo mentality. As Head of Materials Management at ddm hopt+schuler, he has been with the company since 2012 and has since consistently used the space to develop his own ideas and new approaches. For instance, since 2015 he has relied on the use of data glasses in order picking. "Initially, we were primarily concerned with gaining an understanding of this new technology and everything related to virtual and augmented reality," Probst says. "Then the next thing we did was look and experiment with where the use of data glasses would make sense for us. This is the case for order picking; in other areas, it hasn't taken hold." It is this light-heartedness in dealing with new things that characterizes the day-to-day work at ddm hopt+schuler.

"Delegating trust and responsibility, along with a positive culture of accepting mistakes, form the backdrop for creative work," Karl-Rudolf Hopt says with conviction. "I try to establish a culture where nothing is impossible. We don't shy away from problems."



“Staufen’s practical approach of providing direct and honest feedback fits perfectly into our corporate culture.”

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We are just the tinkerers you turn to when there is a problem to be solved. We thrive on these challenges, and they require our creative approach.”

Following production, the R&D area is now also going lean

A successful and creative company, though, not only needs an open corporate culture, but it also needs the right physical space that makes tinkering and producing fun. So since 2016, Staufen AG has been supporting ddm hopt+schuler in designing the workspace. “Mr. Hopt and his team were already doing a lot of things right and were intuitively thinking lean,” explains Staufen consultant Martin Becker. “So we were not surprised that the methods and tools we brought in were accepted quickly and embraced enthusiastically.”

Stefan Probst agrees: “Staufen’s practical approach with its straightforward and honest feedback matches our corporate culture perfectly. Plus, Staufen has its own in-house specialists for every problem, who are able to respond specifically to our needs.” And what’s next as far as Lean at ddm hopt+schuler is concerned? Since 2021, not only production but also the product creation process has been converted to Lean.

“Our industry has been picking up speed for years, and a development time of one year for a new product is now not exceptional,” Probst points out. “By implementing Lean Development, though, this is something we’ll be able to manage well in the future.”

A deep lake as a source of sustainable heating

The only question that remains is how economic success and adaptability are compatible with the key issue of sustainability at ddm hopt+schuler. The answer: extremely well, because in Rottweil, the CO2-free factory has been a reality for a long time. According to CEO Hopt, “We have been dealing with the issue of sustainability for quite a long time, for more than 20 years to be exact. We have also taken on a cutting-edge role in this respect. Our facility is heated entirely with zero primary energy. We achieve this with heat pumps that extract heat from water in a deep lake, and with waste heat from the compressors. Since 2002, our roofs have also been fitted with photovoltaic elements, and we were among the very first to become EMAS-certified (2008).” Likewise, digitalization is doing its part to protect the environment: Each year, using data glasses, Materials Management Manager Probst’s team saves 100,000 sheets of paper. ■

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INSIDE EVERY COMPANY
THERE IS AN EVEN BETTER ONE.

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