

Rolf Themann, who has been Managing Director of GPS since 2015 and made the management buyout in 2016, recently spoke to Glass Machinery Plants and Accessories. Themann, who has sole responsibility for the German IS machine specialist's business operations, was Managing Director and Technical Director before for another IS machine specialist company for almost ten years.



# GPS

## the best of two worlds - tradition meets flexibility and innovation

**G**PS is a leading German-based developer and supplier of IS machines catering to the needs of the international container glass manufacturing industry. The specialist company's product portfolio includes IS machines and components, servo mechanisms, feeders and conveyors as well as control and drive systems for various applications. It also provides consultancy and training services to customers in the container glass manufacturing industry. GPS offers both all-inclusive and modular concepts, because all-inclusive solutions don't always meet the container glass manufacturers' requirements. Sometimes all an IS machine needs is a professional upgrade or the replacement of individual components to achieve improvements in efficiency and product quality. Based on this knowledge and its self-imposed standards of excellence, GPS develops optimum solutions in perfect quality for customers around the globe. At unbeatable value for money.

**GMP&A:** Mr Themann, GPS has been an independent entity since it was sold by Verallia Deutschland AG, formerly Saint-Gobain Oberland AG, in 2016. How would you summarise the past year for GPS?

**RT:** This has definitely been a very special year for GPS – and certainly a milestone in the company's history. We've been both a commercial and technological success. The figures speak for themselves – in 2016 we



achieved seven percent growth in annual revenue thanks to our excellent work over the course of the year. Global demand for our products has risen and we've secured some big contracts with several major customers.

We're doing a very good job of consolidating our market position as a leading developer and supplier of IS machines and components for the container glass industry. After some 28 years of affiliation to Saint-Gobain Oberland AG, it was time for GPS to stand on its own two feet. Our success over the past year is impressive proof that it was the right decision.

**GMP&A: It sounds like a new beginning for an old expert. What's so special about your position?**

**RT:** Firstly, it's not really a new beginning. It's a strategic refocus that makes GPS a more modern, innovative and flexible company. Today we combine tradition and innovation, uniting the best of both worlds in our unique products and services. The fact that the year went so well for GPS despite all the major changes is probably also related to the vast market experience we have accumulated over the years. We're obviously no stranger to the glass industry as a former division of one of the biggest players in the

German container glass sector. And we've taken the extensive sector know-how that we gained during that time, plus our insider knowledge, with us. It enables us to identify our customers' needs, to understand the operational challenges they face and to deliver the optimum solutions - with minimum impairment to their production operations. We know what it takes to be a reliable partner in this sector.

**GMP&A: What are the GPS innovations that you mentioned? What can your products do better than rival products?**

**RT:** Since becoming an inde-



pendent company we've launched a genuine innovation drive. Last year GPS registered six new patents, all of which demonstrate technical excellence. The patents registered in 2016 are various innovative modules for IS machines: a gob delivery system, a safety door, a system for automatic lubrication, a shear spraying system, a deadplate cooling unit for glass containers and a servo plunger. We're also working on a number of patents and new developments this year. The new modules for IS machines don't just improve productivity and efficiency, they also enhance product and production qual-

ity. All of them have unique optimised designs, geometries and mechanics. They can be integrated in any make of IS machine and are suitable for installation at very different production facilities.

**GMP&A: That covers a lot of applications. How does GPS manage to be so versatile?**

**RT:** Operating as an independent company we can be extremely flexible. GPS specialises in the optimisation of automated hot-end processes in container glass production. And we don't differentiate between machine manufacturer or size – double, triple or quadruple gob. GPS has always had the specialist expertise to sustain this diverse range of products. But now that we aren't a division of a major corporation we have the freedom to offer that expertise to a wider market. GPS isn't affiliated to any company, system or manufacturer, so we can deliver the very best solution to every single one of our customers.

**GMP&A: You've made your manufacturing competence very clear. What about service and maintenance at GPS?**

**RT:** GPS is an integrated supplier. We manufacture machines for the container glass industry and provide a range of product-related services for those machines. These services optimally supplement the high quality GPS portfolio. And they don't stop with installation because we provide a full lifecycle management service for all IS machines and components – from the initial concept that is developed with the customer, through the design of a customer-specific solution to machine maintenance and upgrades, training and a 24h service hotline. We also recently introduced a financing service for our machines. So we provide a

comprehensive range of services focused on delivering the best possible solution to the customer. And, at GPS, the best possible solution doesn't necessarily mean the most expensive one. Our customers don't always need a custom-made design, and we don't always have to replace entire machines. The GPS experts are aware of that, and it's the reason why we're always able to offer the best value for money to the customer.

**GMP&A: You mentioned securing major contracts earlier on. Would you mind telling us who your customers are?**

**RT:** We get enquiries for GPS machines and services from container glass manufacturers all over the world. We have customers in Europe, North and South America and Asia. Our global operations are expressed in our mission statement: Precision made in Germany – used around the globe. We attend international trade fairs such as Mir Stekla in Russia or Glassman in Lyon.

2017 is going to be an exciting year for us and we're looking forward to the next chapter in GPS's innovative future.

**GMP&A: We're also excited to see what GPS will be doing next. Thanks very much for the interview. ■**



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