



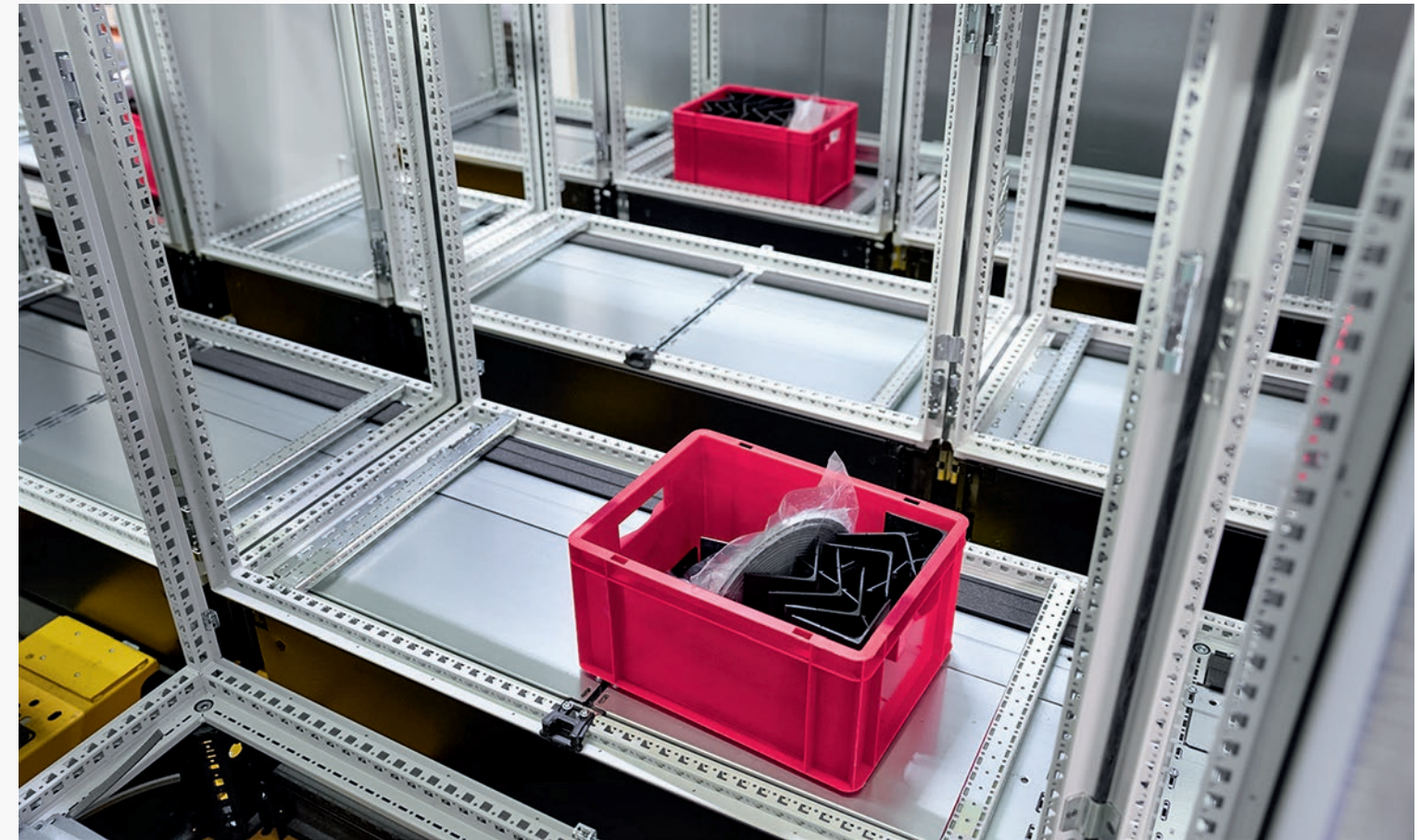
What really matters in times of crisis? How do active and passive partnerships differ?

Challenge for mechanical and plant engineering companies

# CAUTION – SUPPLY BOTTLENECK!

The **Beumer Group** and **Blumenbecker** are actually doing very well. The order books of these two businesses in the German town of Beckum are full. If only it weren't for the **supply bottlenecks!** Suppliers are currently under renewed scrutiny as a result. What are the criteria for good partnerships, though? The example of **Rittal and Eplan** shows it's about more than the ability to meet supply commitments.

Text: Annedore Bose-Munde



Empty enclosures are not uncommon, and that includes panel building and switchgear applications. Blumenbecker, too, sometimes has a long wait for built-in components such as control technology.

**T**he Beumer Group is one of the big international players when it comes to intralogistics and material handling systems. Mark Antonius Behler takes a certain degree of pride in setting out its wide-ranging portfolio, although producing that portfolio requires well-functioning relationships with suppliers – relationships that are currently being compromised by supply bottlenecks. “The biggest challenge for Beumer at present is reacting to volatile supply chains and finding alternatives,” says Behler, Director Engineering & Project Management Product Business at the Beumer Group. “In difficult situations, having the flexibility to switch suppliers is important,” he adds.



*“We see solid partnerships as the number one stabilising factor for our supply chain.”*

**Mark Antonius Behler**  
Director Engineering & Project Management Product Business at the Beumer Group



*“It’s vital to expand partnerships with suppliers who can overcome even difficult situations.”*

**Reinhard H. Agnesens**  
Key Account Manager at Blumenbecker Automatisierungstechnik

Blumenbecker, one of Beumer’s top control system suppliers, is also having to contend with supply problems. “The worst thing is when we have deadlines to meet but it’s impossible because our suppliers fail to meet their deadlines. That messes up our entire production schedule,” says Reinhard Agnesens, Key Account Manager at Blumenbecker Automatisierungstechnik. “In one specific instance, for example, we had to install empty en- ▶



**Packaging machinery** such as the unit shown here is manufactured by the Beumer Group for its logistics customers.

closures on an interim basis and deliver the necessary components to go inside later on. This challenging situation cost us a lot of time because of the extra communication and processing work, and the need to delay the order," reveals Markus Tigges, who is responsible for all Blumenbecker engineering projects.

**ACTIVE PARTNERS CALLED FOR**

So, what exactly is the approach adopted by these two businesses when demand is high but supply lines often collapse somewhere or other? "When things got tough, there were definitely suppliers who confirmed orders and also their ability to deliver, but then nothing happened. Others at least phoned to tell us they were

unable to meet the delivery deadline," says Behler, describing the situation.

There are, he says, all sorts of suppliers out there. "We now distinguish between active and passive partners. In the case of an active partnership, we expect realistic suggestions to solve any problems that arise," Behler continues. When it comes to passive partners, Beumer now has at least one alternative supplier and has also increased its stocks. "We are essentially happy to rely on our partners and, as I see it, a good partnership includes two-way dialogue. We know exactly where we are with Rittal in this regard," underlines the project manager. Tigges agrees with him. "Thanks to on-time deliveries, our collaboration with



Rittal has worked very well, even during difficult periods," he says. Binding promises regarding delivery deadlines are also very important to Blumenbecker. "We therefore initiate the order process very early on, simply because that makes it easier for suppliers to respond," explains Tigges. "It's vital to expand partnerships with suppliers who, financially speaking, can overcome even difficult situations," adds Agnesens.

**IT'S ALL ABOUT BEING ABLE TO DELIVER**

Besides the quality of the products supplied, the issue of actually being able to deliver has become decisive for both the Beumer Group and Blumenbecker. The priority is treating both customers and suppliers as partners. "We are in very close contact with our customers, and that especially includes communicating the delivery times of various suppliers. We may switch suppliers if the components are equivalent in technical terms and switching will lead to shorter delivery times," explains Agnesens. The supply situation has triggered a global rethink at many companies. For example, a large number of processes have come under renewed scrutiny, including aspects such as innovation, digitalization and sustainability.

**FOCUS ON DIGITALIZATION**

Innovations at the Beumer Group used to mainly be geared towards optimising the performance and quality of equipment. That is now changing. "We have, without doubt, also reached physical limits that mean optimisations no longer make sense. The focus of innovation is now increasingly on digitalization. Customers expect us to leverage the possibilities it offers," says Behler. If a system were to go down, for example, no-one would now want to wait three days for a service engineer. Faster interventions in the case of system faults, reduced downtimes and less travel all also contribute to sustainability. As regards Beumer's products, energy-efficient implementation is a further focal point.

Blumenbecker, too, leverages digitalization in its panel building and switchgear value chain. Having made a start on this some time ago and already developed solutions in-house, it has now switched to Eplan engineering solutions. The issue of interfaces is key when it comes to mapping reliable processes. "Data interfaces and innovations on machinery are important to us, as is dialogue with Rittal and Eplan," emphasises Tigges.

**DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS FOR THE FUTURE**

Both businesses need to reposition themselves to meet all these challenges in the future, which means also focusing on collaboration in the area of digitalization. Blumenbecker regards Rittal and Eplan as development partners for optimising the value chain, and many projects are handled with a coordinated approach. Besides various Eplan engineering solutions such as Eplan Electric P8 and Eplan Pro Panel, for example, Blumenbecker also uses the latest automation solutions for machining enclosures and components, including milling, drilling, laser machining and cutting centres from Rittal.

The Beumer Group, too, is taking a close look at processes and optimising them, always with an eye on well-organised data management and precisely defined interfaces. "We see Rittal as a pioneer – both for products and in terms of approaches to digitalization. We are happy to adopt the same approach as part of our development partnerships," says Behler. Beumer paid Rittal a visit to explore the possibilities of the Eplan Smart Wiring software tool – a virtual assistant for manual wiring in panel building – and has already received some suggestions for engineering cable harnesses. It was also interested in Eplan Fluid, an engineering tool for project planning in the



**The latest automation technology:** Blumenbecker sees Rittal as a development partner for optimising the value chain.

**Full order books:**

Blumenbecker offers solutions and services for process automation, control technology and industrial maintenance/requirements.

areas of hydraulics, pneumatics, cooling and lubrication. To further optimise its own digitalization processes, the Beumer Group is planning to work with Eplan and Rittal as digitalization partners for mechanical and plant engineering. ■

**VIDEO INTERVIEW**

with Mark Antonius Behler from BEUMER



**VIDEO INTERVIEW**

with Reinhard H. Agnesens from Blumenbecker



**When manufacturing** its mechanical and plant engineering equipment, the Beumer Group depends on well-functioning relationships with suppliers, as Mark Antonius Behler is fully aware.