Customer contact from afar from BUCHER EMHART GLASS

How do you ensure support, instruction and a timely start of operations when you are not allowed on the customer's premises? This was the challenge the Mexican project team of Bucher Emhart Glass and our customer Fevisa faced in the spring of 2020.

Angelica Trejo from Fevisa and Antonio Mandujano from Bucher Emhart Glass talking to Bucher colleagues Scott Neubert (large image on screen), Jesus Rosales (lower left) and Juan Saldivar (second from left).

In normal times, Bucher Emhart Glass regularly visits its customers on site to offer advice, install equipment, optimise production lines and provide support in operations. In 2020 this was only possible on a very limited basis. For interacting with its customers, the division therefore relied on video conferencing, animated presentations and training videos, webinars, and training for sales staff in the effective use of these tools. Machinery was also configured by remote access.

With the use of such tools, lots of commitment on the part of both the customer and the division, and an abundance of creativity, the division and one of its customers even managed to successfully install a new glass production line – without the staff of Bucher Emhart Glass being on site. The story on the following pages shows how this was made possible and what lessons were learned for the future.

NEW GLASS PRODUCTION LINE FOR FEVISA

When the pandemic hit in the spring of 2020, Bucher Emhart Glass was in the midst of installing the new glass production line for Fevisa in Mexicali, Mexico. From one day to the next, Emhart project teams had to leave the premises.

From this point on, the company's engineers stayed in continuous contact with Fevisa through a mix of digital applications. Text and video messengers such as 'WhatsApp' and 'Pexip' allowed the customer's engineers to have direct contact with our teams, whose members were themselves in different locations. Through regular videoconferencing, in-depth training was provided on the new production line. In addition, direct remote access to the machines enabled specific analyses from anywhere in the world.

POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

In this challenging situation, Emhart's long-term customer Fevisa had an unexpected positive experience: "We never had more ownership over our production line," Angelica Trejo, Project engineer at Fevisa.

"I am very proud of what our teams have achieved working together remotely," Victor de la Torre, Fevisa Plant manager.

BENEFITS FOR FEVISA

Fevisa saw a number of benefits:

- first-hand knowledge of every aspect of the new production line in operation;
- greater confidence for future machine commissioning; and
- established processes for support and training through virtual communication.

> "This unprecedented situation brought us a whole new perspective on the opportunities of remote assistance," Scott Neubert, Project manager for Bucher Emhart Glass.

BENEFITS FOR BUCHER EMHART GLASS

- more flexible use of our specialists, independent of location;
- new expertise in virtual support;
- successful customer empowerment.

BUCHER EMHART GLASS

Bucher Emhart Glass is the world's leading supplier of advanced technologies for the manufacturing and inspection of glass containers. The equipment and automation technology offerings are supplemented by a broad range of advice and support services – care, empower and academy – to help customers operate and optimise their equipment. Bucher Emhart Glass has its headquarters in Switzerland, while its manufacturing facilities are located in Germany, Sweden, the USA, China and Malaysia. The division operates a research and development centre in the USA.

GOOD PROFITABILITY DESPITE MARKED DECLINE IN SALES

In the first half of the year, the division's operations were severely affected by the closures of production sites in China,

REMOTE SUPPORT

Malaysia and partly in the USA, as well as by travel restrictions and logistics bottlenecks. From the middle of the year onwards, equipment installations and on-site service were resumed at least partially. Overall, sales were down by 14 per cent against the very good previous year but recovered somewhat in the second half of the year. The division implemented various measures to reduce costs, and in China it continued adapting capacities. The operating profit margin could be sustained at a good 10.5 per cent despite the marked decline in sales, supported by a high proportion of spare parts.

ACHIEVING A MILESTONE IN THE REPORTING PERIOD

The first two complete End-to-End production lines commenced operation in recent months. These production lines integrate the entire glass container manufacturing process – from the hot end, where the glass containers are formed, to the cold end, where they are inspected – via a central database, the Control Center. Immediately after forming, the glass containers are marked with a unique laser code.

Sensors measure a wide range of process variables and parameters of the glass containers along the production line. The data is analysed and the glass manufacturer is advised on how to adjust the machine's settings. By means of closed-loop controls, settings can even be updated automatically. The latest example of such a closed-loop control is the Smart Feeder with the GobRadar, which is coming to market soon. It uses a camera-based sensor to optically monitor the weight and shape of each individual gob during forming and automatically adjusts the feeder as required. These technologies allow glass container production to be continuously optimised which reduces production waste and, therefore, energy consumption. They have been well received, mainly in western markets so far. During the reporting period the division also noted growing interest from China in these new technologies.

UNIQUE WORLDWIDE: TRAINING UNDER GLASS

The division completed construction of the training centre in Windsor, Connecticut, USA. The complete production line, including the furnace Bucher Emhart Glass has operated for several years for research and development purposes, has also been utilised for 'Training under glass' for several months. This offer is one of a kind worldwide – glass manufacturers can engage in training designed exactly for their needs and practice their theoretical learning directly on the relevant machinery. For example, when a customer has invested in new sensors for its production lines, its engineers and technicians learn about the sensors' functionality and application. Not only are they trained with documentation and by specialised trainers, but they can also test first-hand what they have learned on glass production machinery in operation. ■