

Hans-Walter Schläpfer: "Strength based on innovation"



Why did Sulzer establish a central research and development unit?

Sulzer Innotec was created for various reasons. Two factors were particularly decisive: first, the decision to transform the dedicated machine manufacturing firm into a multi-industrial technology group; and second, the goal of efficiently bundling expertise in the core competencies of materials and fluid mechanics. This eliminates the duplication of activities on the one hand, while enabling the divisions to focus their capabilities on product development on the other.

What are your main areas of focus?

New customer-oriented solutions are essential to ensure the continued success of Sulzer going forward. Our main goal is to bring new technologies to the market within 5 to 10 years and to roll out new products and services within 3 to 5 years. The Group strategically manages the longer-term development of the entire portfolio using technology and

Sulzer Innotec performs contract research and provides technical services to support the divisions of the Sulzer Group and to open up new areas of business as well as offering its expertise to external customers. The President of Sulzer Innotec, Hans-Walter Schläpfer, spoke to us about the unit's current areas of focus.

product roadmaps. The aim is to launch the projects with the greatest innovative potential rapidly and successfully.

How do you make sure you know the needs of the market?

We maintain a constant dialogue with the Group's four divisions in our capacity as a technology developer. We are also supported by the Innovation and Technology Council (ITC), whose members include the Chief Technology Officers (CTO) of the divisions as well as the Head of the Patents department. We organize regular workshops both within the ITC and together with colleagues who focus on the needs of the market business development in order to generate products that make optimal use of the Sulzer's resources.

Can you give us a recent example?

Around three years ago, we became aware of the market need for a mobile and high-precision multi-axis laser processing machine with a high level of electrical efficiency. Our response was to develop a robot-controlled system with an ytterbium fiber laser. Its design makes it possible to carry out high-precision deep and contract welding in the laboratory or on site at the customer's premises. Our professional services and advice in the field of laser welding are sought by both internal and external partners thanks to this tool.

How does Sulzer Innotec promote the exchange of information with university research departments?

Although the exchange of data is much easier today due to the Internet, interpersonal contact remains the most important means of communication. Sulzer Innotec employs just over 100 specialists from different scientific disciplines and cultures. Many of them have professional links with the universities. This global network of contacts benefits our work. We also participate in important committees and maintain an intensive dialog with professors around the globe.

A final question: what makes Sulzer Innotec a good place to work?

We are proud that we can exploit our industrial knowledge to create sustainable solutions for the future using state-of-the-art tools. Our work is varied and offers considerable potential for development. The fact that Winterthur and Switzerland are an appealing place to live in terms of both leisure pursuits and family life are two further benefits!

Interview: Beat Winterflood

Hans-Walter Schläpfer

Aged 59, studied at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich and completed a PhD in Materials Engineering at the University of Neuchâtel. He joined Sulzer in 1978 and has been President of Sulzer Innotec since 2000. Hans-Walter Schläpfer was appointed Chief Technology Officer (CTO) of the Sulzer Group in 2005 and chairs the Sulzer Innovation and Technology Council (ITC) in this capacity.