

# Tasks, opportunities and visions: Interview with Dr. Witt, COO of Jagenberg AG

Dr. Stephan Witt, 48, has been part of the Executive Board of Jagenberg AG as COO since July 2021. In the first part of our interview, the head of operations talks about new tasks, important company topics and the growth of the Jagenberg Group.

***Hello Dr. Witt. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us. You have now been part of the Executive Board and Chief Operating Officer of the Jagenberg Group for just over a year. How have you experienced this time?***

I've been with the Jagenberg Group for more than six years now, and as Managing Director at Kampf Schneid- und Wickeltechnik GmbH & Co KG I was responsible for operations for a long time. In that position, I have already been able to get to know many employees and the other managing directors. We worked together in various committees to organize the orientation and structure of the Group. In this respect, the transition was not a leap into cold water, but rather a change. Of course, the office in Krefeld and the immediate environment were new at first. But on the whole, I knew what it was all about from day one and was quickly able to get to grips with the important issues.

***What are the important issues you are working on?***

There are basically three major issues that I deal with at Group level.

Firstly, as COO I am responsible for the operating business in the Industrial Solutions area. This involves maintaining the individual companies in the Group's own responsibility while at the same time ensuring that they act in a coordinated manner. To this end, for example, we meet regularly in strategy meetings, as I was already familiar with from my time before in the Group. Of course, my focus is different now. But we still discuss the strategy and its results for the independent action of the



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companies, taking into account the defined guard rails. For me, this trust in the companies is crucial to our joint success.

Another exciting question I am addressing is: How do we want to develop the Group and its business areas? Jagenberg Converting Solutions GmbH, founded a year ago, is an ideal example here. After all, turnkey plants for battery production as well as surface and decor applications are still quite new for us. In this way, we are responding to the requirements of the markets. The area also includes looking for and integrating new suitable companies and technologies for the Group.

And thirdly, I am concerned with the Group's external image, which is a novelty. While we traditionally presented ourselves as a "diversified group of companies", we are now focusing on synergies. Our common denominator is the processing of web materials – for example for electronic components, packaging and medical as well as battery technology. Admittedly, for the companies, the joint appearance and the common brand image initially means a break. This was not easy for everyone, because it also meant giving up something familiar. Here, our task as the Executive Board consisted to a large extent of listening and explaining the idea behind our CREATE.FUTURE.TOGETHER. mission statement and the overall appearance. It was important for us to involve as many employees as possible, to allay their fears and to show them the benefits that such a change would bring.

We succeeded very well in doing this. The joint brand is well anchored and we are in the process of implementing the first major trade show appearances as a recognizable sign following the Corona lockdowns.

***Apart from the topics themselves, on which you are working: How is working as a member of the board different from your job as managing director?***

It differs spatially and also in the way we work together on a daily basis. When it comes to the fundamental direction of the company, I coordinate very closely with Dr. Bröker. Together we also represent the Group externally. This includes meetings with politicians, bank representatives, the owner Mr. Kleinewefers, the Supervisory Board and all other stakeholders. As a result, communication and responsibility are inevitably different, they are less direct. Looking inward, I see my role vis-à-vis the Group companies as advisory, more as a pilot for the companies than as a captain, if you will.

***So compared to the traditional understanding of a manager, do you see yourself more as a team player?***

In my opinion, this classic model with leaders and top-down decisions no longer works. The dynamics and complexity of business life are simply too great. Instead, you have to involve employees according to their competencies and motivate them to participate in change and take personal responsibility. At Kampf, we have seen the effective and sustainable results that can be achieved by involving everyone from the bottom up. Of course, we had to provide some framework conditions. But creating free space has proven to be exactly the right thing to do, and at Kampf, for example, it has changed project processing enormously for the better.

***You mentioned that you are constantly looking for new companies to adopt new technologies. What about the integration of new companies into the Group?***

The first thing to say is that integration is an ongoing process and can never be complete. During the Corona pandemic, we integrated the two companies WDB Systemtechnik GmbH and Atlas Converting Equipment into the Group. Of course, we had to synchronize processes and data, but the most important thing was to take the people with us – you have to build trust with openness and honesty. To this end, the board of directors and the managing directors of Jagenberg Converting Solutions visited WDB at the very beginning and introduced themselves personally. At Atlas, too, personal presence was quite crucial. Instead of a feeling of "we've been bought", we were able to convey a welcome feeling and build trust in the group and our strategy.

In the second part of the interview, find out how Dr. Witt assesses the state of digitization in mechanical engineering and what he plans for the future.

"For me, trust towards the companies is quite decisive for our joint success."

Dr. Stephan Witt