

Interview with Dr. Stephan Witt: Focus on digitization and the future of mechanical engineering

Dr. Stephan Witt, member of the Executive Board of Jagenberg Holding since mid-2021, talks in the second part of the interview about digitization, the future of mechanical engineering and personal visions in his role as Chief Operating Officer of the Group.



Dr. Stephan Witt, 48, member of the Executive Board of Jagenberg AG

Dr. Witt, the keywords digitization and Industry 4.0 are moving the industrial world. How do you see the Jagenberg Group positioned here?

Our companies Kampf and Lebbing have always been intensively involved with digitalization. This makes this important topic an essential part of our business model. However, we must not rest on our laurels. In view of the dynamic nature of developments, it is much more important to maintain it or to expand it further to the best of our ability.

Mechanical engineering has long been about more than simply supplying machines. Today, “Made in Germany” is still a sign of quality – but it is no longer a key unique selling point. Consequently, we see ourselves first and foremost as a solution provider. It is important for us to understand what our customers want to do, what their goals are, and which processes, logistics and methods are behind them. In addition to the choice of materials, this includes above all a digital database. We anchored this understanding both within the Group and in each individual company back in 2014. This makes digitalization an essential, extremely present building block for our future.

The topic of “sustainability” in particular is benefiting enormously from this development: with the help of modern methods and information technologies, we can link the entire value chain from raw material to finished product. Jagenberg Digital Solutions, Kampf and Lebbing already have a very advanced range of solutions here. Kampf, for example, is active in the R-Cycle initiative, where it is committed to making materials recyclable and

“As machine builders, we have a duty to deliver not only the hardware, but also intelligent data processing.”

Dr. Stephan Witt

also to seeing products that have reached the end of their life cycle as potential raw materials.

Let's talk about this openly: Our machines are sometimes used in sensitive areas, and plastic waste is a serious issue that not only threatens the world's oceans. That's why we are working very hard to establish a well-functioning circular economy. In my opinion, the industry is called upon to face up to its responsibility and present sustainable, well-functioning solutions. As machine builders, this puts us under an obligation to supply the hardware and intelligent data processing that makes this possible.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that digitization is an important part of our Group's DNA. I am therefore confident that we will be able to meet all challenges positively. The Jagenberg Group has already proven this in the past and has been quick to react and reposition itself in situations of upheaval. For example, when digital photography overtook its analog predecessor, Kampf had to compensate for serious changes within just two years because a major market disappeared. This change was the cornerstone for the machines used to process optical films, for example for cell phone displays, where Kampf is now the world market leader. So far, the companies in the Group have always succeeded in opening up new areas of business on the basis of many years of experience. As a company, we are not driven, but have a high degree of resilience. This – as well as the trust our owner places in us – enables us to think and act for the long term.

You think and plan for the long term. What are your visions for Jagenberg AG?

'Visions' is a big word, and I have to leave the answer to this question a bit open. I don't make decisions on my own. What I can say, however: Unlike the so-called visionaries of our time, we at Jagenberg live the tradition of our company and the responsibility for 1,300 employees and their families every day.

Nowadays, vision is almost always synonymous with disruption. My vision for the Jagenberg Group is one of continuity, not radical upheaval. Rather, I want to align Jagenberg AG with the mechanical engineering of the future and exploit the Group's synergies even more intensively. Our task as a group of companies is to think in a more networked way, across Europe and worldwide, internally and externally. We already cooperate with our customers at a very early stage in the development of solutions. We also maintain contacts and networks with suppliers and research institutes. Everyone benefits enormously from this.

This mindset is expressed in our motto CREATE.FUTURE.TOGETHER. We shape our future together – for us as a company, as a community and as individuals. I am convinced: With this philosophy, we are absolutely on the right track and will do what we are already doing today much better in a few years!

... the topic of "sustainability" is benefiting enormously from this development. (...) We are working with great commitment to establish a well-functioning circular economy.

Dr. Stephan Witt