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## Using inner strength and innovative technologies to drive growth The Schmersal group is celebrating 70 years of existence

Since the 1980s, the Schmersal group has focussed on the safety of man and machine and is now among the global market leaders when it comes to machine safety. The company is currently developing into a system and solution provider and pressing ahead with internationalisation.

Philip Schmersal, managing director and shareholder, the third generation of the Schmersal family, explains strategy and trends in machine safety.

**From product manufacturer to system and solution provider: This is how you recently described current developments at the Schmersal Group. To what extent have you already approached this objective and what steps still need to be taken?**

**Philip Schmersal:** In the last two to three years, we have completed a considerable change and can now already offer our customers machine safety systems and solutions. These include, for example, complete solutions to secure hazard areas, but also customer-specific programming of safety controllers, as offered by our "Application Engineering" division and services from our "Functional Safety Engineers". Our wide-ranging, modular product range of over 25,000 products is an excellent basis for a role as a system and solution provider in the market. This means we can react extremely flexibly to the specific requirements of our customers and develop individual solutions for all applications.

**Founded in 1945, Schmersal is still run by its third generation of owners. To what extent has the management style changed in recent years and adjusted to market developments?**

**Philip Schmersal:** The management style has had to change as the company has grown. A company group with seven production sites around the world, a wide and ambitious technology portfolio and branches in more than 20

countries can no longer be run by the owner along, especially as the decision-making processes are becoming ever more complex. This is why, as of 1 April this year, we have appointed Michael Mandel as managing director of K.A. Schmersal GmbH & Co. KG. In his new position, he will also retain responsibility for our Technical Division.

We now have an excellent management team and can make decisions quickly and without bureaucracy, as is normal in medium-sized companies, but always based on expertise. And it is increasingly the case that the management committees and other leadership panels are staffed on an international basis with colleagues from different sites.

**Your development focuses on electromechanical and electronic safety switches and safety controllers. What has happened to the one-time hobby horse, lift engineering?**

**Philip Schmersal:** Lift technology is still an important area of business for us, and we are also developing into a system provider with a comprehensive product range of not only switchgear but also controllers. We made an important step in this direction with the integration of Böhnke & Partner GmbH in 2013. We are presenting some exciting new products together at Interlift 2015.

**What new products are in the starting blocks to be presented at SPS IPC Drives late this autumn?**



Graduate in business engineering Philip Schmersal is the third generation to lead the company, which was founded 70 years ago.

**Philip Schmersal:** Please understand that I cannot announce any specific products yet, it is still a long time until the end of November. But you can expect new products from us in terms of safety switchgear, safe opto-electronics and safety-oriented controllers. For us, SPS IPC drives sets the pace for the presentation of innovative products and we will not disappoint the visitors to the show.

**In which product areas do you see Schmersal as the market leader and why?**

**Philip Schmersal:** We see ourselves as a global leader in the whole area of machine safety. Nobody has such a broad product

range as us, and we cover lots of different technologies. We are technological leaders when it comes to safety switchgear and our Safety Services are also at the very top of the market. At the same time, we have increasingly developed industry know-how, especially in our key sectors such as the food and packaging industry. We know the requirements of our customers precisely and this knowledge is incorporated into the development of our products, such as the development of our N-range, a product range which meets the requirements of hygiene-compliant design.

**One of the current trends in automation technology involves shifting functionality from a hardware level to a software one. Does the same apply to machine safety?**

**Philip Schmiersal:** Yes, very much so. Our safety controllers allow very user-friendly adaptation of safety functions to the individual applications. Many customers buy customer-specific OEM variants with "tailored" programming from us. And the trend towards a shift to the software level will continue, especially in line with the move towards the "Smart Factory" and "Intelligent Production" in line with "Industry 4.0". This poses whole new challenges for safety technology which we as a company are facing with enthusiasm.

**Networking and human robot cooperation are two more current issues. Are you also active in these areas?**

**Philip Schmiersal:** Over ten years ago, we were already carrying out the basic development work for a range of safety controllers to allow the monitoring of robot movements. They not only monitor the axles of the robots but also their positions within a three-dimensional space. This creates a protected virtual working space. This is a central require-

ment for cooperation between humans and robots without a safety fence. And in terms of networking, we offer our mechanical and plant engineering customers a wide range of interfaces for different designs and communications standards.

**It says on your website that "Schmiersal believes in quality". How do you ensure standards remain consistently high across seven production sites in Europe, Asia and South America?**

**Philip Schmiersal:** It only works if we work with uniform production systems around the world. The production and assembly workstations in our factories, in Brazil and China for example, have exactly the same equipment as the lead factory in Wuppertal, which is still and will remain our largest production site. This means that our factories in Asia and South America apply the same high quality standards, carry out the same tests and work with the same raw materials, tools and development programs. The whole working culture is also at a comparatively high level. The factories outside Europe produce primarily to meet local demand.

**Schmiersal began internationalising its production back in the seventies. You have a service and sales presence in more than 50 countries. What are your expansion plans for the immediate future? In what countries and markets are you hoping for above-average growth?**

**Philip Schmiersal:** Now that our latest factory in India is in full production, we feel we have a good global presence. We are adapting our production capacities to increasing demand. We are currently expanding our Brazilian factory as part of a multi-phase project and we recently moved into a newly built and

considerably larger factory in China. Overall, we are carefully observing the developments in the global safety systems market in order to capitalise on growth potential where it makes strategic sense.

**Organic or inorganic - what is your growth strategy for the future?**

**Philip Schmiersal:** Our growth has mainly been organic and we will continue to handle it like that in the future. This does not mean that we will not gain strength through acquisitions in some cases if they are a good match. This was the case for Böhnke & Partner in Safety Control. But our first priority is to grow from inner strength and through innovative technologies we develop ourselves. There is also more than adequate potential for growth from industry solutions and Safety Services.

Images:  
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