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‘As **automation** continues to gain **steam, safety** basics needs to be reinforced’

Mr. Sagar Bhosale, Managing Director
Schmersal India

Schmersal India, a leading player in machine safety, recently celebrated a decade of its existence in India. The company has indeed come a long way since its humble beginning as a sales organisation to tap the growing Indian market. Today, the company has a manufacturing facility in Ranjangaon near Pune and is in fact the only company producing safety switches directly in India. It expects further growth in production and employment in the coming years, courtesy increasing awareness of safety in the industry.

To know more about the company’s growth plans and evolving trends and innovation in the machine safety segment, Shweta Nanda spoke with **Sagar Bhosale, MD, Schmersal India**. He opens up about the need for safety to evolve to keep pace with the rising trend of automation and challenges in the Indian market. Excerpts:



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Safe solutions for your industry

Q. Please shed light on the key technological trends and innovation emerging in the machine safety segment.

Market of safety is moving ahead at an extremely rapid pace. One of the trends that is gaining traction is series connection of safety sensors, which enables different safety devices to communicate with each other. For instance, let's say a company is using five different safety devices, then series connection ensures that these disparate devices are able to talk to each other and with the main controller seamlessly. In fact, even devices from two different generations can communicate easily.

Secondly, more and more organizations today expect safety sensors to have diagnostics and predictive capabilities to reduce downtime. They expect that operators should have clear visibility into safety sensor status at the machine, at his station locally as well as at the command center.

Another trend we have been noticing is that organizations are getting more comfortable with electronic sensors as compared to the earlier generation of electromechanical sensor. Infact, there has also been a steady rise in the demand for sensors for specific applications. For instance, the pharmaceuticals and food industries are demanding hygienically safe sensors. Apart from this, there has been a surge in the popularity of safety sensors with RFID technology.

Q. In the last ten years of Schmersal's existence in India, have you noticed change in approach towards machine safety?

Yes, definitely. There has been a sea change in the attitude towards safety with a large number of organizations recognizing the value of human life. There has been a significant rise in the demand for safety solutions due to twofold reasons. Firstly, awareness around their benefits has increased. Earlier there was a lot of scepticism around safety solutions due to the notion that they hamper productivity. However, over the years organizations have realized that this is not the case with the advanced safety solutions. In fact, it's the other way around. Safety in place ensures peace

of mind for workers who can concentrate on work, which in turn increases productivity.

Secondly, international standards and global safety norms have propelled Indian companies to augment their safety initiatives. In today's connected age, safety and design engineers in Indian companies are constantly in touch with their global counterparts. They are updated on the safety practices and policies followed globally and feel necessary to have similar practices here in India. This is a great transformation as engineers now expect organizations to have machines conforming to relevant international standards.

Q. How is automation transforming the machine safety segment?

Automation is the future of manufacturing. There are no two ways about it. As automation continues to gain steam, safety aspect needs to be taken care of. Today, robotics is taking over the manufacturing floor. There is little doubt that robotics brings several advantages and is slated to witness further uptake in the days to come. That said, it is of utmost importance to address security issues with robots. For instance, we need to make sure that robots and humans are working together without endangering the human life and the process.

With automation becoming widely prevalent, safety basics need to change completely. Direct Safety should be employed in the basic stage when the systems are being designed. We at Schmersal are sensing tremendous opportunity in the automation segment and are committed to addressing the safety aspect.

Q. Tell us about your manufacturing facilities and tec.nicum division?

Our world-class manufacturing facility has a production space of 3,000 square meter, where we manufacture safety and electromechanical products. We follow stringent quality norms similar to our parent company in Germany and conduct rigorous quality check on safety switches. Most of the infrastructure and machines in our facility have been sourced from Germany.

Our tec.nicum division has a team of

five engineers, trained from Germany for functional safety expertise. The specialists at tec.nicum provide support, especially with complex legal and technical questions. They are certified as Functional Safety Engineers by TÜV Rheinland and are specialists in the field of safety technology. This team conducts a comprehensive assessment at companies to evaluate their present safety levels. They also make companies aware about basic safety standards and new rules and regulations coming in. After thorough assessment, the division is responsible for putting necessary safety controls and getting third-party certification for safety. This division is seeing a lot of positive response and growing at a rapid pace.

Q. How do you perceive India as a market? What are the challenges and how is Schmersal tiding over these challenges?

Although Indian organizations have started realizing the importance of safety, this is true primarily for multinational companies. Smaller companies still bypass many safety protocols. Making them aware and convincing them to follow safety guidelines is definitely a challenge.

We at Schmersal conduct seminars especially in smaller cities targeted specifically at MSMEs. These companies have constraints in terms of having skilled resources and money so we offer them complete, easy-to-operate solutions. To ensure optimal use of safety devices, we interact with employees who directly use the devices and train them. We also have a demonstration room at our factory, where customers can physically see the solution in use and experience the ease-of-using the device, its diagnostic capabilities and other useful features in person.

The good news is that we get a lot of requests for knowledge on safety. We see a lot of desire from companies to assess their safety status and achieve compliance with safety norms. This is definitely an extremely positive trend and we expect safety to emerge as an integral aspect for a large number of Indian companies in the coming years. ■