

Co-operation supports process automation goals

In 2014, Bucher Emhart Glass launched its BlankRadar forming process control system, based on XPAR Vision's Gob Assist and Blank Temperature Control products. Now, this agreement has been extended, with Bucher Emhart Glass selling the XPAR IR-D system under the Bucher Emhart Glass FlexRadar brand. Martin Jetter, President of Bucher Emhart Glass spoke exclusively to *Glass Worldwide* about this development and its positive implications for the international glass container industry.



Martin Jetter, President of Bucher Emhart Glass.

Extended co-operation has taken the business relationship between XPAR Vision and Bucher Emhart Glass to the next level, allowing both companies to focus on their core competencies to achieve strategic goals. For Bucher Emhart Glass (BEG), this focuses on the realisation of an 'end-to-end' vision for glass container production by automating the process from gob forming to inspection. For XPAR, it is to develop hot end sensors, data integration and robotics for the purpose of efficiency improvement, weight reduction and automation. "Since a progression

in process automation is a core element in both organisations, it is easy to find commonalities where co-operation is and can be possible" says Martin Jetter, President of BEG. "This arrangement is beneficial for both companies."

The XPAR IR-D replaces the original FlexRadar system that was developed by BEG. As with the BlankRadar equipment, BEG is providing full support for the FlexRadar system, including sales and marketing, documentation, installation and maintenance, training and system integration. XPAR Vision continues to sell, market and support its own IR-D system independently. In addition, XPAR will continue to implement future system enhancements and developments based on customer and BEG requests. This supports BEG's focus on multi-variable closed loop developments, automatically adjusting process parameters based on measurements from BlankRadar and other sensors.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Martin Jetter confirms that his company's value proposition to customers is process automation. "We have many reliable actuators

in our portfolio that can be used to control the forming process in closed loop applications but when it comes to sensors, we are not interested in re-inventing the wheel and starting from scratch. Instead we seek strategic partnerships with companies that offer mature and reliable technology to the glass industry."

The BlankRadar system, for example, is described as a very powerful platform, with numerous potential applications. Currently the system is installed and operational at sites in Europe and North America, where BEG is focussed on harvesting feedback to ensure the technology's successful implementation. Information communicated back to the company from end users has been positive, with re-investments in the technology observed.

According to Mr Jetter, the system sits comfortably within the BEG portfolio alongside the company's Temperature Control System (TCS). "The TCS is a cost-efficient measurement system that, together with our closed loop applications, can control key mould equipment temperature parameters. If the temperature is under control, however, the next logical step is to measure glass temperature, gob loading and in time, control it as well."

Taking into account the system's architecture and measurement capabilities, BlankRadar is considered a more powerful platform going into the future. "The TCS is still a competitive product, while BlankRadar is a premium option" says Martin Jetter. "BlankRadar is tailor-made for BEG forming machines and plays an important role in automating the forming process with closed loop technology. The GA/BTC equipment is also available for non-BEG machines and focuses on how the operator can optimise the process by interpreting information from the device, therefore increasing the skills of the operator."

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INCREASED CO-OPERATION

Customer reaction to the collaborative agreement between Bucher Emhart Glass and XPAR Vision has been positive. The agreement benefits both companies, while also enabling customers to reap the benefits of their combined expertise. According to Mr Jetter, XPAR's IR-D system is the industry standard when it comes to hot end forming monitoring. "Over the years, it has grown into a mature platform that accommodates many different forming scenarios. BEG realises that this is state-of-the-art technology and with this device in our portfolio, we see possibilities to develop further innovations for the glass industry.

"In recent years there has been a paradigm shift as process automation is no longer a push from the supplier but a pull from the market" he continues. "By leveraging both companies' expertise, we can answer this call from the market and put glass in pole position as a packaging material."

Martin Jetter contends that most customers are now looking for a single source when it comes to the supply of complete production lines, with the customer/supplier relationship having evolved into a partnership in recent times. "Having one partner for technology supply avoids any doubts about ownership. And having the XPAR solutions in our portfolio will further strengthen our strategy to be recognised as a solution provider – far beyond from being solely an equipment supplier."

BEG looks forward to increasing the integration of proven IR-D/FlexRadar systems into its control systems. Data exchange will not only be the infrastructure for the company's 'end-to-end' and closed loop technologies but an increased systems integration is expected to solve many of the everyday problems experienced by users with isolated systems.

Mr Jetter stresses the important contribution made by such advances to ensure the competitiveness of glass packaging. "Other manufacturing industries would not consider 90% efficiency a good number whereas in the glass industry, this is a good performance. Whereas with the aid of process automation, there is also a platform in place to further increase efficiency in the glass industry" he says. "With better control and measurements in the process, it will be possible not only to detect inconsistencies and reject them earlier but more importantly, to automate corrective actions in order to avoid producing such inconsistencies. We believe in glass as a packing material and can see that it is winning ground due to its sustainable footprint and its inert properties. As a supplier of forming/inspection equipment, we contribute by providing tools to increase efficiency and by lowering the cost impact on containers."

SHARED VISION

Bucher Emhart Glass and XPAR Vision share the same vision of driving process control and automation to the next level. The portfolios of both companies are considered perfectly complementary and are keys to achieving this goal. "The journey has just started and there are many developments ahead of us, to which both companies can contribute" Martin Jetter concludes. "Therefore, Bucher Emhart Glass is open to future co-operation agreements with XPAR Vision. We are excited by the opportunities 'end-to-end' will bring to the industry." ■

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