HOFMANN BLECHBEARBEITUNG

FAMILY BUSINESS, FAMILY VALUES

Founded in 1887 and now in its fourth generation of family ownership, Hofmann Blechbearbeitung is proud of its values.

The philosophy of the company is built not just around business values – precision, innovation, close customer contact and openness, but also around personal values of trust, reliability, self-esteem, professionalism and honesty.

Works Director **Oliver Lehrach** explains: "These personal values are very important to us and come from the fact that we are a family company."

The benefits of this approach are not just philosophical, they are practical too. "We are situated right in the middle of 'packaging valley', with six big packaging equipment manufacturers within a 20 km radius. They pay good wages, so we want to make sure they don't tempt our trained people away. That's why it is so important to create an environment where people want to work."

He says that, above all, the most important thing is to develop the employees of the future.

"We train our own skilled workers and take on three new trainees every year – which isn't bad for a 65-person company. We have an apprentice workshop and for every three apprentices we have an industrial foreman who looks after them and gives them targeted training.
The most important thing we can do to stay competitive is to secure the next generation of skilled employees. Coupled, of course with ongoing investment in the latest production equipment so that we can stay as flexible as possible."

One of the company's biggest recent investments was a first, then a second *ToolCell 220/40* automated tool changing bending system with *CADMAN®-B* programming.

The machines are designed for bending large sheet metal parts with a daylight up to 600 mm and a 400 mm stroke, for maximum bending capacity.

Says Oliver Lehrach: "We have customers with demanding requirements so we need to have a flexible production capacity to meet their needs. They are mostly focused on the manufacture of complex plant equipment, primarily for the pharmacy industry, but also for drive technology, ventilation and foodstuffs.

left to right: ***Tobias Brendle*** *(operator),* ***Manuel Stiefel*** *(technical draughtsman),* ***Andreas Schuch*** *(head of production control)*

"Our real focus, and where we really have our know-how is in welding, and in particular the welding of large fabricated assemblies. These are generally one-offs or small series – anything complicated, very demanding, and big."

"We can't run the press brakes for several hours on the same part. That's why we came to LVD; they could offer a machine that would give us fully automatic tool changes."

He explains that there were three main drivers for investing in the *ToolCell* machines and programming software, with the first being workplace safety.

"In the past, once the operator had completed a job he had to take out all the punches and dies by hand and put the next set in – they are mostly very heavy and difficult to handle. Not only was there the danger that they might hurt their back or drop them on their feet, there was also the chance that they might trap their fingers between the tool segments as they were pushing them together. Automated tool-changing avoids all that.

"Secondly, the automatic setup saves time. While the machine is setting up the tooling, the operator can be putting the completed parts from the last job back in the store and collecting the blanks for the next job. By the time the machine has completed the tool change, he is ready to download the next program and start the next job.

"Finally, and most importantly, we have a more robust and secure production process. The operator no longer needs to intervene in the machine. He doesn't have to input any bend allowances, doesn't have to input the tool data – the programming software has automatically done this for him.

"The company is not a volume manufacturer and we have a lot of setups and tool changes on our machines."

There is no longer the possibility that he will make a miscalculation or put in the wrong tool. "We continuously track our failure costs and have calculated that, since we started using the *ToolCells*, they have fallen by more than 30 %."

The LVD *CADMAN*® software integrates well with Hofmann's other machine tools and can import and translate laser cutting and punch press programs produced as GEO files.

Lehrach concludes: "We were one of the first companies to get one of these machines, and the fact that it only took us five months to order a second shows how confident we are of this LVD machine."