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CLEAN PERFORMANCE

Olaf Reuter has realised his entrepreneurial dream. His innovation in electrochemical cleaning conquered the market from the very start – something also reflected in the growth of his trade fair stands.



Even though it wouldn't have taken much for Reuter to become a welding and mechanical engineer. This story also leads to the heart of his core innovation. "Originally, I wanted to be a chemist," Reuter recalls. He even completed a traineeship, but the

»We are prepared for anything.«

Olaf Reuter, Managing Director of Reuter GmbH & Co. KG

laboratory atmosphere seemed rather intimidating. And the dilemma familiar to all welders always remained a fascination for him: metal surfaces have a thin protective layer of chromium that prevents corrosion. Welding destroys this protective layer and causes discolouration or rust. After welding, the surface must be cleaned and the protective layer renewed. But how? In his free time in 2009, Reuter experimented with a completely new process that had first been developed in Australia: electrochemical cleaning using a carbon fibre brush. "As soon as I saw the prototype, I knew it would be a new market niche." And when he succeeded in mass-producing the brush so that it performed five to ten times better than comparable products, his journey really took off.

■ It's the dream of many founders. After tinkering on an idea for many years, he took the plunge – and the idea hit the market running. So much so that just eight years later, he had a stand at the industry's most important trade fair covering as much space as all of his competitors combined. Olaf Reuter has been living this dream since he founded his eponymous company in 2009. Only the term "young entrepreneur" is somewhat misleading in his case, as firstly, Reuter GmbH & Co. KG is already the second company he has founded, and secondly, the 56-year-old is a seasoned industry expert with nearly 30 years of experience in the welding world.

Premiere at the joint stand

Making a fresh start in the midst of the banking and financial crisis seemed like a burden – or so it would seem. But Reuter and his two initial employees didn't feel burdened at all – quite the opposite, in fact. In their very first year, they landed 150 orders – with three years to complete them. Now, Reuter felt ready for the big stage: SCHWEISSEN & SCHNEIDEN, the event where his core target group gathers. But the exhibition stands he had in mind

Photos: PR



In 2013, Reuter GmbH & Co. KG celebrated its SCHWEISSEN & SCHNEIDEN premiere at a shared stand. Ten years later, the company's 16 square metres of exhibition space had grown to 115.

were already booked. Thanks to the Messe Essen project team's initiative, an alternative was found: joining the shared stand under the "Young Innovative Companies" programme.

Although only 16 square metres in size, the stand received significant financial support from the federal government and was prominently located in Hall 3. The effect was instantaneous. Reuter's company grew so rapidly after its trade fair debut in 2013 that in 2017, he felt it was time to "make a statement in the market" – in the form of his own 100-square-metre stand with enough space for all his innovations plus an eye-catcher: a vintage Citroën food truck, which has since been his trademark at all major trade fair appearances. In 2023, the exhibition space even reached 115 square metres. This year, Reuter will once again be developing innovations for September 15, when the global trade fair opens its doors – now with 20 employees. There's no shortage of ideas at Reuter anyway. He has filed "over ten patents", and two new ones are currently undergoing reviews at the European Patent Office. "And we are the only manufacturer in the world in the field of electro-chemical cleaning to have TÜV-tested devices with the GS mark," reports Reuter.

The next target: USA

He generates 70% of his sales through exports, and his product range now includes fully automated systems. But Reuter remains hungry for new territory. He recently identified a new use case: cleaning commercial swimming pools – 10,000 of which exist in Germany alone – where stainless steel is becoming increasingly important. "But knowledge about proper material care is still almost non-existent." The USA is also new territory – but it



won't be for long, as Reuter has already made preparations for market entry. The high entry barriers due to costly certifications don't deter him any more than the current turmoil in trade policy: "We are prepared for anything."

The future of company management is also already secured. Olaf Reuter plans to attend SCHWEISSEN & SCHNEIDEN 2029. Then, at the age of 60, he would like to retire. His son, Patrick, 24, also a mechanical engineer and welding specialist, has been with the company for several years and will be managing the company's presence in Essen this year.

A STAND FOR NEWCOMERS

Thanks to the "Young Innovators" programme, start-ups can participate in SCHWEISSEN & SCHNEIDEN at reduced rates and present themselves to a trade audience from over 120 countries under the umbrella of a shared stand in Hall 3. This internationality is one of the reasons that the trade fair has once again been awarded a funding programme by the German Federal Office for Economic Affairs and Export Control (BAFA). The goal of "Young Innovators" is to develop export markets. Further information and participation conditions can be found at:

www.schweissen-schneiden.com