



## A partnership spanning decades

The Vorarlberg-based firm of Julius Blum GmbH and EROWA have enjoyed fruitful cooperation for many years. Equipment Production, a department in the company Werk 3 – Technik, is run by Gerhard Gorbach.

**EROWA: Mr. Gorbach, could you please give us some key data about Werk 3 here in Höchst?**

Gerhard Gorbach: "We work in the field of tool and mold manufacture. Besides mechanical cutting processes such as milling and grinding and the assembly of tools and assembly plants, EDM and WEDM are one of our core operations. Equipment Production employs several hundred people.

Added to this, there are no fewer than 280 apprentices, whom we train for the company as a whole. This is particularly important because it is difficult to attract a sufficient number of specialists.



Our goal and at the same time our great challenge is high productivity at low cost. This means: short machining times, a high degree of utilization and low error rates. Our work is closely interlinked, from development to production."







**We'll come back to that aspect in a minute. But can you first tell us something about your cooperation with EROWA? This has got tradition, hasn't it?**

You can say that again! This goes right back into the mid-1980s when we had a closer look at the FMC concept. This philosophy convinced us. We use ITS, UPC, MTS and FrameSet tooling systems to this day throughout production. Equally important: Since the mid-1990s, EROWA has been our most important partner in the field of automation.



**And this is where the interlinkage you mentioned before plays a role. Is EROWA also involved here?**

It is, with the JMS@pro, which was developed by EROWA's subsidiary CERTA Systems GmbH. It is the pivotal interface of our production, as it were, which runs 24 hours a day all year. We distinguish between level 1 with CAD, CAM and integrated ERP, level 2 with JMS@pro and level 3 with the actual automation and production itself. All levels communicate with each other.

**This is called Industry 4.0!**

Industry 4.0 or "smart factory" are slogans which are used by everyone who operates a fast data line or uses a robot somewhere or other. But it's really more; all levels must be interlinked. We've been developing and practicing this for 20 years. And it's only this interlinkage that turns automation into a powerful tool and gets the robots and production cells to do what they should: more operating hours, adherence to deadlines through perfectly planned processes and constant quality. But the factor of personnel/operation ratio is also extremely important: In view of the shortage of specialists, it is very valuable to us if people don't have to stand by the machines and can be employed elsewhere.







### And is EROWA also involved in automation?

Involved as a competitor, yes. But in this area, our evaluations are always project-related. A bit of competition can't do any harm; EROWA also profits from it. But we do now have four EROWA Robot generations in operation, besides a few other products from competitors.

### Please tell us about your latest project!

This is where we wanted to set a new benchmark. This was about the procurement of additional WEDM machines. Our EDM Manager, Roger Turner, put five suppliers to the acid test. In May 2016, we commissioned four Fanuc EDM machines and a Mafac workpiece cleaning and drying facility.

The whole cell is served by an EROWA Robot Dynamic 250 Linear, which was also delivered in May 2016. In June, we were able to commission it, and the system has been in standard operation since September last year. Specific requirements included the integration of the cleaning facility, of course also into the JMS@pro, but also the great number of magazine positions in a very confined space. In the cell, one-off parts, a wide range from small to quite large are produced.

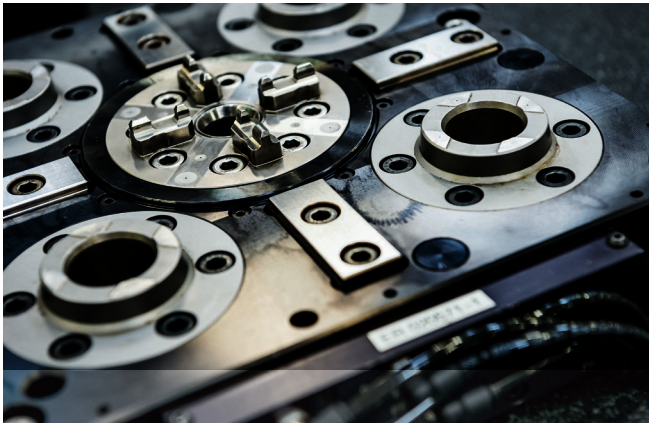


### What about the operation of the cell?

The small loading and unloading station did not correspond to EROWA standards, so a solution had to be found there. At the moment, we still load and unload with trolleys which are pushed by hand from the setting-up station to the cell and from there to quality assurance. This will also be automated in the future. As for the rest, the employees' range of activities has changed quite a lot. Besides technological know-how, employees now also require a talent for organization.







**So the use of the new production cell can be called a success. How would you characterize cooperation with EROWA?**

According to the value cherished by Blum, partnerships are always a matter of give and take. Accordingly, EROWA always gets feedback from us, also when – or particularly when – they have not been chosen for a project. It is an open and honest exchange, you could say like two partners climbing stairs. Conversely, our concerns are always listened to. It's certainly also important that EROWA, on its part, is owner-managed. That fits.

**Can a Swiss supplier be competitive at all in these times of the strong franc?**

Some of them are struggling, that's clear. But EROWA has overcome the currency problems. And added to that, there is consistency. EROWA stands for the ur-tooling system as such, has affirmed its first-class quality for 30 years, offers a top service and is highly reliable in cooperation. All that pays off too!

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