

A Service Provider for Chemical Products

A Family Business Faces the Challenges of the Future

The family business A + E Fischer-Chemie celebrated its 125th anniversary on the 1 May 2005. The history of the company began in 1879 with the foundation of Fischer & Roesch, a small chemist, chemical and paint business. In the meantime, the company has established itself in the Rhine-Main region as a modern service provider in the area of chemical distribution. Nikolaus and Manuel Fischer-Bothof, the present Managing Directors of A + E Fischer-Chemie, give an account of the past, as well as the present situation and future strategies of the company. Questions were posed by Dr. Birgit Megges.

CHEManager: To start with, let us take a brief look into the past. How did it all begin?

M. Fischer-Bothof: The history of the company began in 1879 with the foundation of Fischer & Roesch, a small chemist, chemical and paint business. Soon after, however, Georg Roesch withdrew from the business and Ernst Fischer, a cousin of our great-grandfather Adolf Fischer, joined the company as a co-partner. On the 1 May 1880 the family business „A + E Fischer“ was launched in Mainz. In the following years it advanced from a chemist's business to a significant chemical wholesaler serving the Rhine-Main region. In 1926, Theo Seulberger, the Karlsruhe firm with the same line of prod-



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es was inaugurated and two days later the 75th anniversary was celebrated. Under the leadership of our father, Dr. Ernst Fischer-Bothof, the firm grew to become a well-known leader in the area of chemical distribution in the Rhine-Main region over the following decades. The move from Mainz to Wiesbaden in 1969 provided the opportunity to build a completely new storehouse. After joining the company in the beginning of the nineties, and lat-

ness involving Europe and overseas, which was established during our father's leadership, has been intensified, thus establishing us as a modern service provider in the area of chemical distribution in the Rhine-Main region.

The firm has been growing steadily. Can you mention some basic data?

M. Fischer-Bothof: In the last 15 years the transaction volume of approximately € 10 million, excluding company acquisitions and the related turnover, has risen to more than € 17 million. In business, we have also had to recognise the general tendency with regard to the drop in commodities. However, as our consumers are predominantly middle-sized customers for chemical products, it was possible to compensate the loss of quantity with other business transactions. We have made a point of concentrating on only a few large-scale consumers due to that fact that discontinuation of a chemical trader's traditional products could lead to considerable problems. Although in the early nineties specialities played a secondary role with regard to transaction volume, they now account for almost one-third of today's turnover.

How has A + E Fischer-Chemie positioned itself today with regard to its range of chemical products, clientele and range of services offered?

N. Fischer-Bothof: In our opinion, with the adjustment of the product range towards specialities, the respective advisory service by technicians, and above all, due to the flood of legal regulations, the chemical trade has become more and more a service provider. We have allowed for this development by extending our speciality business with products requiring explanation, and which in the past was focussed on the paint and lacquer industry, to other branches such as cosmetics, pharmaceutical products and special applications in the chemical industry, but without losing sight of the chief classical products - acids, bases and solvents.

Our contacts in France, as well as those in Poland, have proved that we concentrate not only on the primary area Rhine-Main, i.e. Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland and the southern German regions which we serve together with Theo Seulberger. Problem solving for our customers abroad continues to be a popular service. Here, the long-term relations to our overseas partners have paid

off. An increase in turnover by 25% with regard to export in recent years speaks for itself.

Water treatment chemicals and the wide area of application are particularly important for us as we anticipate a growing market under the heading „blue oil“. Special fillings in the area of gases, fluids, and solids for our customers round off our range of services, whereby, with regard to special fillings, we work together with our quality management team in order to establish what suits us best.

The important status as an associate partner within the Penta group, the activities of our sister company Theo Seulberger in Karlsruhe and our shareholding in Reher & Ramsden, Hamburg, and Wilhelm Graen, Munich, all serve to secure the medium-sized character and identity of a family business for the future.

The market situation at present, especially for medium-sized companies, is not exactly easy. What strategies do you employ in order to succeed?

N. Fischer-Bothof: Companies of our size can continue to exist in the face of concentration pressure in the area of distribution through co-operation. On the one hand, membership of the Penta group enables us

to serve customers working nation-wide within the scope of Single Sourcing and also to offer our contractual partners area-wide marketing of their products on the other hand. In this way, with the medium-

A + E Fischer-Chemie, data 2004 (including Theo Seulberger)

Yearly turnover	€ 17 million
Yearly tonnage	approx. 35.000.00 t
Tank storage capacity:	
Acids and Bases	400 m ³
Solvents	1000 m ³
Plant area	20.000.00 m ²
Transport/Lorries	11 Lorries
Employees (incl. Theo Seulberger)	54
Trainees per period of apprenticeship	2

sized orientated Penta group, we offer our producers a clear alternative to the immobile structures of affiliated groups. As a medium-sized family business, we wish to remain independent and, with our concept for service, consider ourselves service providers for chemical products - contrary to pure traders. As we compete with other suppliers/providers, we, in contrast to our competitors, have to react much more quickly and flexibly to the requests of our customers. In German there's a colloquialism: "It's not the great that eat the small, but the fast who eat the slow".

The term "Customer Care" is an important catch-phrase be-

cause we, as opposed to affiliate groups with high levels of fluctuation and constant reorganisation, are in a position to guarantee one competent contact person. In this way, we can assure that interests and concerns of our customers are centrally dealt with by one person.

With regard to our customer structure, we will continue to make sure that we do not become totally dependent on any particular customer. The declarative of our company guidelines which states that we shall do everything to satisfy the needs of our customers, depends on the customer's countermove to settle invoices according to the agreed conditions.

Which short and long-term targets have you set for your family business?

M. Fischer-Bothof: The building of an additional storehouse for solids should be completed this year. A plant specially for filling activated carbon for use in swimming pool facilities has also been planned. In order to optimally market our expertise in the handling of chemical products, we would like to offer our customers and our supplying partners more often the possibility to have blending and special filling of chemical products carried out on our own premises. Furthermore,

together with a partner from the area of tank construction, we would like to provide our customers with further advantages when doing business with us, whereby we will be concentrating more on the development and marketing of specialised tanks and not on offering business „off the peg“. With regard to our activities abroad, at present we are in the process of extending our existing business contacts for special products in USA and Poland.

► A + E Fischer-Chemie, Wiesbaden
Tel.: +49 611 92846 50
mf@fischer-wiesbaden.de
www.fischer-chemie.de



Nikolaus and Manuel Fischer-Bothof, Managing Directors of A + E Fischer-Chemie

ucts, was acquired by our grandfather, Ernst M. Fischer. Shortly before the end of the second world war, all storage and administration building were completely destroyed, but despite all adversities, on the 29 April 1950 the new prem-

is in the company management, my brother and I promoted classical products like acids, bases and solvents, as well as expanding the speciality business and introducing quality management. Furthermore, the initial export busi-

Partner for Outsourcing Projects

Chem-Trade & Consulting, located north-west of Hamburg, specializes in the marketing and distribution of organic fine chemicals, acting since April 1998 mainly as exclusive agent/representative for foreign manufacturers. In addition to aliphatic, aromatic, and heterocyclic compounds, the company offers a wide range of dyes, UV absorbers, and preservatives. The company recently started to offer food colours, including FDA-certified dyes. The kilo-laboratory, started in the UK in 2002, has just re-located to the Bayer Chemiapark in Leverkusen. It is a modern facility equipped with glass reactors of up to 20 litre capacity. The adjacent pilot plant has 20 vessels, stainless steel and enamel lined, up to 500 litre capacity, for scale-up and custom synthesis projects. Commercial quantities are available via toll facilities.

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