DANIEL KURR

"We're not putting on a show here"

TRUMPF opened its Smart Factory in Ditzingen six months ago. Customer Center Manager Tobias Reuther was positive as he took stock of the digital factory. And in an interview, he talks about what has changed for customers and TRUMPF employees.

30 machines that constantly communicate with each other, 50 employees who show this to customers and in doing so already process about 100 tons of sheet metal into parts for machine tools every month. That is TRUMPF's Smart Factory. Its fully networked machinery is therefore more than just a showroom for customers. Here, TRUMPF cuts, punches, bends and welds sheet metal parts for its own machine tools: side panels, cable ducts or machine housings. In this way, small and medium-sized companies in particular can see what efficient and automated sheet metal processing looks like in practice.

Tobias Reuther is head of the TRUMPF Smart Factory. In an interview, he reveals why smartphones play a central role in manufacturing.

Mr. Reuther, the Smart Factory opened six months ago. What sets it apart?

Reuther: "We are pushing the limits of what is technically feasible here: What we developed yesterday, we test today and show it to our customers tomorrow if possible. With a total area of 5,000 square meters, this type of demonstration center for digitized sheet metal processing is probably unique. And worldwide. The Smart Factory extends over four production halls: Going from high-performance stand-alone machines on to semi-automated systems right to fully automated autonomous processes, there is sometimes more, sometimes less automation to see in each of the four halls."

"Mister Smart Factory": Tobias Reuther, head of the TRUMPF Customer Center in Ditzingen, draws a positive interim balance of the digital factory.

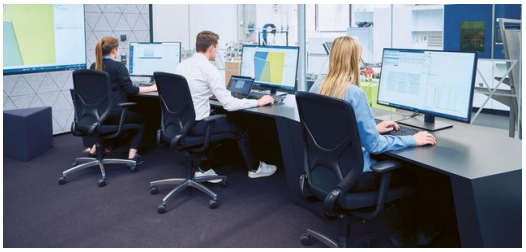
And how is that received by customers?

Reuther: "We're not putting on a show here. Anyone who enters the Smart Factory immediately senses that humans and machines are working here in a real production facility. What visitors see is authentic. It makes sense and is understandable. A customer recently said to me: 'Now you, too, can see the problems we face in our production.' That's exactly what we want - to get even closer to the needs of our customers.

As a solution provider, our focus is not just on individual machines, but on the entire sheet metal working process."

What does that mean for employees?

Reuther: "Increased efficiency of up to 30 percent means a change for the employees. At TRUMPF, even more so than at the customer's, because here the Smart Factory is a showroom, production unit and training center all at the same time."



The heart of the Smart Factory is the Control Center: From here, employees have an overview of all machines and processes in networked sheet metal production.

Consultants, machine operators and trainers in one hall: How does the cooperation work?

Reuther: "The employees sometimes compare us to a patchwork family. While one of them is demonstrating a punching machine to a customer, the other is cutting sheet metal parts for our plant in Hettingen a few meters away on the fully automatic laser machine. And in between, colleagues are holding a training session at a bending cell. So we all have to coordinate closely. It's like a symphony orchestra: the interaction creates the perfect result. This togetherness also works well thanks to smartphones or smart watches. This guarantees full transparency and every employee has an overview of all machines and production processes."

In the Smart Factory, all employees are equipped with mobile devices: A Smart Watch informs them about the status of the automated production. Should a malfunction occur, it can be remedied immediately.

And what has changed in terms of collaboration?

Reuther: "We work even more closely together here than we did before anyway. In the Smart Factory, the machine operator receives tips and tricks on programming and operation from the application expert; and the machine operator explains to the application expert where a machine can be further improved during regular operation. A win-win situation that also helps our customers in the end."

Does the coronavirus limit you?

Reuther: "Of course - at the same time, it accelerates our path to digitization. All our machines have cameras. Every employee has a smartphone cam. With the help of additional cameras, we can bring the Smart Factory to home screens at every angle. In the last few weeks alone, we've quadrupled our digital demonstrations. Every day there are up to seven group visits, going

from one hour to a whole day seeing our Ditzingen Smart Factory on every continent!"

When visitors can't come to the Smart Factory in Ditzingen, the Smart Factory comes to them: Virtual demonstrations of networked sheet metal production have quadrupled at TRUMPF in recent weeks.

Would you now also like to take a look at the Smart Factory? You can find the new Smart Factory image film here

DANIEL KURR