

” DIGITAL BUSINESS MODELS HAVE GREAT POTENTIAL IN HYDRAULICS

Mark Wever is Chief Digital Officer at Stauff Global. His view of digitalisation goes beyond the IO-Link. However, in his eyes, digitalisation is not an end in itself, but rather a means to improve customer focus and thus create added value. He spoke to O+P Fluidtechnik about the opportunities for the hydraulic sector associated with this.

Mr Wever, how did you end up in the hydraulic and connection technology sector? What do you like about this sector?

As I originally come from the Sauerland region, I was already aware of the STAUFF Group as a family-owned, global mid-sized company. In 2010, I was looking for a new career challenge in a company with potential and opportunities for personal development and that's how I got in contact with STAUFF. To date, this industry has felt very international and varied to me. I particularly like the down-to-earth and ap-

proachable nature of the people I deal with. Furthermore, the sectors in which hydraulics are used are so varied with so many different applications, from agricultural machinery to oil rigs, that bring you into contact with so many different business partners around the world. And, last but not least, the hydraulics industry offers great potential for new, specifically digital business models that offer our customers added value.

Digitalisation is still a major task for industry. For many companies, it means collecting and interpreting data. Does the same apply to the hydraulics and connection technology sector?

Definitely. Every manufacturing company produces masses of data along the entire value chain. The ultimate challenge is to organise this data and make it usable to enable you to derive knowledge from it. Customer benefits and competitive advantages can then be derived from this.

We're not just talking about machine data here. For instance, if I fully track and interpret customer interaction on my ecommerce platform, then I obtain direct and, above all, unfiltered customer feedback that I can then use to improve my services.

As Global Chief Digital Officer, you have initiated an education programme – why is that so important for STAUFF?

We have developed a digital and interactive learning platform with our STAUFF University that imparts knowledge through e-learning courses. This is aimed, firstly, at customers operating in the mechanical and plant engineering sector who wish to understand the major interrelationships within fluid technology or deepen their technical expertise. The information on our product groups and their functions is also well received by installers and project managers. We have received positive feedback from merchants and even buyers who use the platform to find out about components and prepare for discussions with suppliers or service providers.

Installation, usage and maintenance are crucial for the performance of a hydraulic system. However, there is major potential for error in this, which can be considerably reduced by educating and qualifying employees. The more competent users are, the safer are their hydraulic systems. STAUFF is more than just a full-line supplier for the components of hydraulic lines and deals with the entire line system. Offering the relevant specialist knowledge is therefore consistent with this approach. The STAUFF University is part of our publicly accessible digital platform and is available to any interested parties, as are our live streams.

A man with short dark hair, wearing a dark grey blazer over a light blue button-down shirt and dark blue jeans, is sitting on a modern white leather sofa. The sofa has several bright green pillows. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a dark, solid color.

Mark Wever

What other opportunities and challenges will digital technologies and services provide for the fluid technology industry?

My present experience is that today's technology offers us almost limitless possibilities. Fortunately, there are fewer and fewer companies not dealing intensively with these issues. Otherwise this would have undoubtedly led to them dropping out of the market in the long term. The challenge for most companies, in my estimation, is to adopt a compulsory digitalisation strategy, take the concrete next steps, and implement them systematically. As the opportunities seem almost limitless, it is a major challenge to identify applications where these technologies deliver tangible benefits to customers. Too many things are started in parallel, people tend to get bogged

down, and this leads to few visible and useful results. Digital sales channels offer great opportunities, but also risks. From the customers' perspective, these channels offer many benefits, including full transparency about availability and prices. Customers expect a B2B shopping experience that they are also familiar with from their personal B2C environment. I simply give up if I first need to register privately to view prices, need to click through lots of pages to reach the product I want, and don't immediately get all the information that matters to me. Why should it be any different with B2B? As the saying goes... the competition is just a click away.

How can companies sensibly prepare for this?

They need to be bold and continuously question the status quo. They need to create a basic environment that fosters innovations. But that sounds easier than it actually is. It goes all the way to the company's core DNA. Manufacturers, in particular, tend to see themselves as manufacturers of a certain product. They don't realise that customers aren't really concerned with the product per se, but with the problem that the product solves. If I focus too much on this product, I am no longer open to other ways of solving the problem. This prevents disruptive innovation. Digital technologies, in particular, are once again speeding up

the pressure on innovation. We also have to understand that software development needs to become a core competency in our companies. It also means that all employees need to learn to become competent in the use of digital tools. I would be happy if in future we no longer need stand-alone digitalisation units in companies, as this knowledge and expertise will be anchored in all operational departments throughout the company as a matter of course.

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