

MOTION SPECIALIST PM HAS GROWN WITH THE INCREASING CUSTOMER DEMANDS

'WE DON'T DENY THAT WE WORK FOR THE WORLD TOP IN SEMICONDUCTORS'

PM works for the absolute world top. The motion specialist from Dedemsvaart in the north of the Netherlands has grown along with the increasing demands of the market by investing heavily in equipment, partners, software and people. 'Ten years ago, we had an R&D department with three, at most four engineers, today we employ twenty.'

BY MARTIN VAN ZAALEN

Over the past decade, requirements have accelerated, especially from the semiconductor, medical technology and analytical markets. 'In the past, many customers were still happy with a standardised product from the catalogue but today, PM customers ask for solutions that have been developed and produced specifically for them.' Those are the words of Gert Lennips, managing director of PM, developer and manufacturer of linear precision bearings, frictionless slides and positioning systems. 'That has a lot to do with the increasing complexity of the customer's product,' says sales manager Ard Abbink. 'As a result, his core competence is becoming increasingly specialised and for that, he needs all his capacity. For everything beyond that, he likes to be taken care of by specialists like us.'

FASTER AND MORE ACCURATE

This means PM enters the customer's development process earlier, in order to deliver a more complex positioning module that is faster and has a higher rate of repeatability at the end, explains R&D and engineering manager Jan Willem Ridderinkhof. 'Nowadays, for example, we're asked not only to develop and manufacture the linear systems for an XYZ stage, but also the underlying structures that connect it to the machine. That must be a structure with a certain rigidity. Increasingly, they have to function in a vacuum, which in turn requires that the materials used do not gas out. You may also be asked to supply an active vibration isolation that measures and absorbs vibrations.'

HIGHER EDUCATED

Supplying this at an ever higher level naturally requires PM to bring in more technical disciplines, filled in by people with a

higher level of education. Abbink: 'Nowadays, we employ a lot of people who come from a university of technology or a university of applied sciences.'

To this end, we work closely with the Delft and Enschede universities of technology, but also with universities of applied sciences. We are on the curriculum committee of the Saxion Mechatronics course. This way, we ensure that the increasingly complex questions that come our way are properly translated into the content of education.' The number of engineers has of course also grown considerably. Ridderinkhof: 'Ten years ago, we had an R&D department with three, at most four engineers, today we employ twenty. And for large projects, we are expanding that number even further with seconded staff.'

GOOD PLACE

Incidentally, sales manager Bert Post adds: 'The demands placed on our operators have also increased considerably. That's why we also maintain intensive contact with the regional training centres, we provide our own training and we visit primary schools to get young people interested in technology.' The latter is also aimed at expanding the labour market for technology, which is tight in the Netherlands. Is Dedemsvaart, 180 kilometres from the heart of the ecosystem around ASML – an important customer – in the right place for attracting talent? Lennips: 'Our location is actually an advantage. We are surrounded by cities with universities of technology, universities of applied sciences and regional training centres, while you don't



From left to right: Gert Lennips, Bert Post and Jan Willem Ridderinkhof. Lennips: 'Today, PM customers ask for solutions that have been developed and produced specifically for them.' Photo: FotoTheo

have to compete with the big OEMs on the labour market here.'

DIGITAL TWIN

To be able to meet increasing demand, investments have not only been made in people, but also in equipment, software and partnerships. 'We have the best production machines on the work floor. We have the latest PLM software at our disposal, so we can first create a complete digital twin from the modules, thoroughly simulate and test its operation before physically producing it. And we work closely with loyal partners to supply things like linear motors and materials.'

WORLD TOP

PM works for clients all over the world, but focuses on the customer base in Europe and especially the Netherlands, where the world top of the semiconductor is well represented. 'In principle,' says Abbink, 'we never talk to customers about other customers. But if we're asked if we work for the world top in the semiconductor, we won't of course deny that. And then people won't hesitate putting you on one line with that world top.' And rightly so, he believes: 'In the Netherlands, we have acquired a unique position as a motion specialist. But also worldwide, there are few parties that can do what we can.' ●

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