

Versatile, fast and individual:

Using HOLZMA saws, VINK produces customer-specific orders just-in-time

VINK Kunststoffe GmbH deals all over Europe in panels, foils, rods, pipes, taps, fittings and a wide range of accessories. What makes VINK special is that the majority of parts are custom-machined before leaving the company – for example on various panel saws from HOLZMA Plattenaufteiltechnik GmbH.

A key factor for the enormous success of the company is an almost unlimited variety of choice, its own distribution system and speed. At the distribution and logistics centre in Esslingen, HOLZMA spoke to Philippe Malmendier about the details. As head of Purchasing & Logistics at VINK Germany, he is responsible not only for the German market but also for the technical concerns of Switzerland and Austria.

Wide range of business activities

As a pan-European trading firm, VINK Kunststoffe GmbH buys and sells all kinds of semi-finished products. Its customers are manufacturers of diverse end products in the three sectors that are customary in this line of business, i.e. "industry", "signs & graphics" and "building & construction". "We keep over 30,000 products in stock," relates Philippe Malmendier, "and what we haven't got, we get. This allows us to say with pride that at VINK customers find one of the widest and most comprehensive ranges of plastic semi-finished products and pipe systems in Europe."

The better part of all the materials is processed in some way before being

resold. This can entail cutting panels and pipes to size or CNC machining with drilling and milling. In some countries, VINK, in close consultation with the customer, even takes over production of the end product. Philippe Malmendier comments, "This customer-specific material preparation is our most unique selling proposition."

Along with individual, custom-oriented processing, VINK has also written speed on its banner. "Any order we receive before 2 pm will normally be despatched the following day," reports Philippe Malmendier. "We have built up our own VINK distribution network to ensure this." And he goes on to add, "Thanks to the size of the Group, we are able to offer this comprehensive service at an outstanding price-performance ratio."

The company's history is characterised by expansion

The birthplace of VINK is in Holland. In 1954, the Dutchman M.A. Vink began trading in PVC pipes and fittings with a lorry. He was one of the pioneers who recognised the advantages and benefits of using plastics, a relatively new material at that time. In order to promote the international development of VINK, the company was sold many years later, in 1991, to the Kendrion Group, a Dutch industrial concern listed on the stock exchange. The acquisition of Dukadan in 1994 gave VINK a leading market share in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland. During the 90s, VINK continued to pursue its course of expansion in Europe with acquisitions and new subsidiaries in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Russia and France.

Today, the company is present in 11 European countries at more than 40 different locations. In Germany alone, VINK operates four subsidiaries. These comprise trading firms in Mannheim (established in 1985) and Berlin (1993); and trading and logistics centres in Emmerich (1973) and Esslingen (2001).

In recent years, the entire VINK Group has undergone major reorganisation. The big goal is growth, and Esslingen is no exception. "We are seeing good double-figure growth rates," Malmendier proudly reports, "and we are just at the beginning." One factor contributing to the success of the Swabian company was definitely the restructuring it underwent in 2006 when it moved to new premises in Esslingen. Today, its offices and warehouses cover an area of approx. 10,000 m². From here, goods are supplied to Southern Germany, Switzerland and Austria. Malmendier adds, "We naturally hope that this development will continue for a while, though we shall then inevitably have to increase our capacities significantly once again." However, Malmendier is committed to sound growth and emphasises, "First of all, it is important that we now consolidate our good result."

High expectations

Any company that makes high demands on itself and on its performance also expects a great deal from its production partners. VINK was no exception here and had very precise ideas as to exactly what HOLZMA was to supply in the area of panel cutting. Philippe Malmendier elaborates, "For a start, it was very important for the new panel saw to be able to cope with the wide diversity of materials. Beyond that, the saw needed to be able to cut very big panels – both as single panels and also as books. Furthermore, we naturally also wanted the best price-performance ratio and state-of-the-art technology."

After comparing different suppliers, VINK took just three months to decide in favour of HOLZMA. "The offer, the commissioning – everything was convincing. HOLZMA quite simply met all the criteria," says Philippe Malmendier. "And we were very lucky to have contacts at HOLZMA who gave us the feeling that we were understood, well advised and in very

good hands." Today, the saws run at full speed in one-shift operation plus some additional hours.

Three saws under one roof

When the company moved to its new premises in Esslingen, near Stuttgart, HOLZMA installed the two new panel saws, an HPP 510 P and an HPP 380 P. Recently, they purchased another HPP 380 P, so today their cut-to-size operations can be dealt with very flexibly on three different saws.

Both saw models are able to react flexibly to the very different materials processed at the facilities. This can even be controlled fully automatically by the CADmatic machine control, in which so-called cutting parameters are stored for the many different plastic materials. Saw carriage speed, cutting speed and many other settings are changed simply by pushing a button.

High cut quality is also ensured by minimum-quantity lubrication. Finely regulated and almost residue-free, the lubrication is applied to the saw blade via three nozzles, has a cooling effect during the cutting process and so prevents the material from melting at the cut edges.

Both saws have a cutting length of 4300 mm, allowing VINK to cut large-format panels as well. Saw blade projections of 125 mm (HPP 510 P) and 95 mm (HPP 380 P) make it possible to cut not only very high panels but also books of panels. Nor does cutting narrow strips or trimming present any problems. This allows the best possible use to be made of above all expensive material.

The VINK story is also a HOLZMA story

Esslingen was the first logistics centre of this kind in the VINK Group. "The

Group naturally drew on the experience we gained in Esslingen when establishing or expanding other VINK logistics centres," comments Malmendier. This fact meant a kind of expansion for HOLZMA, too. In the meantime, the manufacturer has equipped many VINK sites with panel-sizing saws: among them Esslingen near Stuttgart in Germany with three saws; Dietikon in Switzerland with a HPP 510 P; and Oslo in Norway with a HPP 510 P. In France, there is a HPP 380 P and an already older HPP 81 saw. And the Swedish VINK Essoplast Group will soon be taking delivery of a HPP 510 P with 5600 mm cutting length. "It can truly be said that the VINK story is also the HOLZMA story," sums up Philippe Malmendier.

Digital networking

The fact that HOLZMA panel-sizing saws have meanwhile been installed in many VINK subsidiaries, makes a cleverly devised concept for adjusting capacity possible. "Most of the European subsidiaries are networked. If one subsidiary has no free capacity or cannot supply the material at such short notice, then we simply produce the order at another European subsidiary, at no extra expense to the customer," explains Philippe Malmendier. "This allows us to honour our promise of "service and speed."

An important tool here is HOLZMA's proprietary optimisation software Cut Rite, which has been installed at most of the locations. With this program, finished cutting patterns can be generated that take time and waste factors into consideration. The pattern contains all the relevant information required for the provision and division of the material. This includes parts, boards, sizes and colours as well as peripheral factors such as trims and new off-cuts. The cutting pattern is then transferred from the office workstation directly to the panel-sizing saw and into production. All the sequences at the saw can be watched in 3D mode on the monitor in real time.

Philippe Malmendier explains, "Optimisation is carried out in the commissioning company. From there, the cutting pattern goes directly to the saw of the partner company."

Another important factor for VINK was that Cut Rite enables automatic part labelling at the saw.

Good staff with experience in plastics

The saws are operated solely by specialists for plastics. "We redeployed warehouse workers who had been with us for many years and who had extensive experience in working with plastics," relates Malmendier.

"Different plastics exhibit different chip formation and scoring, as well as showing different thermal behaviour and having different properties. If the saw operator has no knowledge of these things, it can prove very expensive."

Malmendier did not see the fact that the workers were not familiar with operating a saw as at all problematic. "The programming and functioning of the saw are really self-explanatory. That was also an important criterion for us, because otherwise the whole thing would not have paid off."

Several members of the sales team, together with the designated machine operators, attended training courses at HOLZMA for a fast introduction into the operation of the saw. They then acted as mentors, passing their knowledge on to co-workers. "Furthermore, whenever any questions cropped up, we were always able to get help fast from the HOLZMA service hotline," says Malmendier, commenting on the early days. "This start support was another important purchase criterion for us."

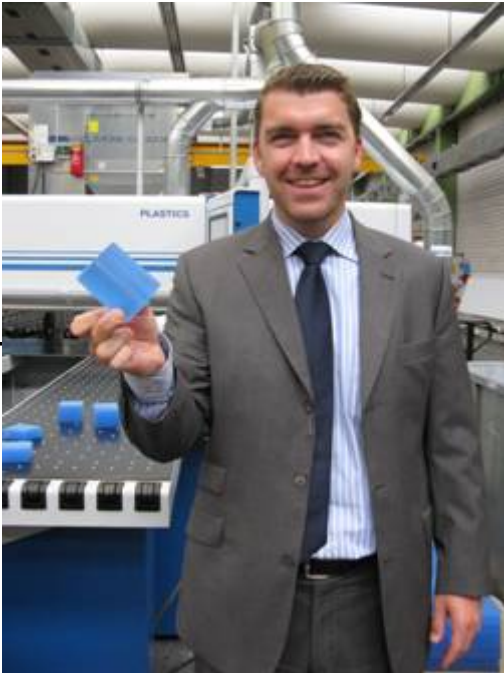
After the official start, staff gathered practical experience bit by bit. "We

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started off with inexpensive materials that were easy to process and have slowly built up our knowledge. The subtleties come with experience. That is the same everywhere."

PICTURES



Picture 1:
Philippe Malmendier, Head of Purchasing/Logistics at VINK Kunststoffe GmbH



Picture 2:
Variety at VINK. The many different board materials alone occupy several such rows. The saw is also located in the store – thus short paths ensure fast, smooth processing of orders.



Picture 6:
HPP 510 P



Picture 7:
HPP 380 P

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