

## Case Study



**WITZENMANN**  
managing flexibility

### **Witzenmann**

*From trend-scouting to implementation –  
the innovation process of a hidden champion*

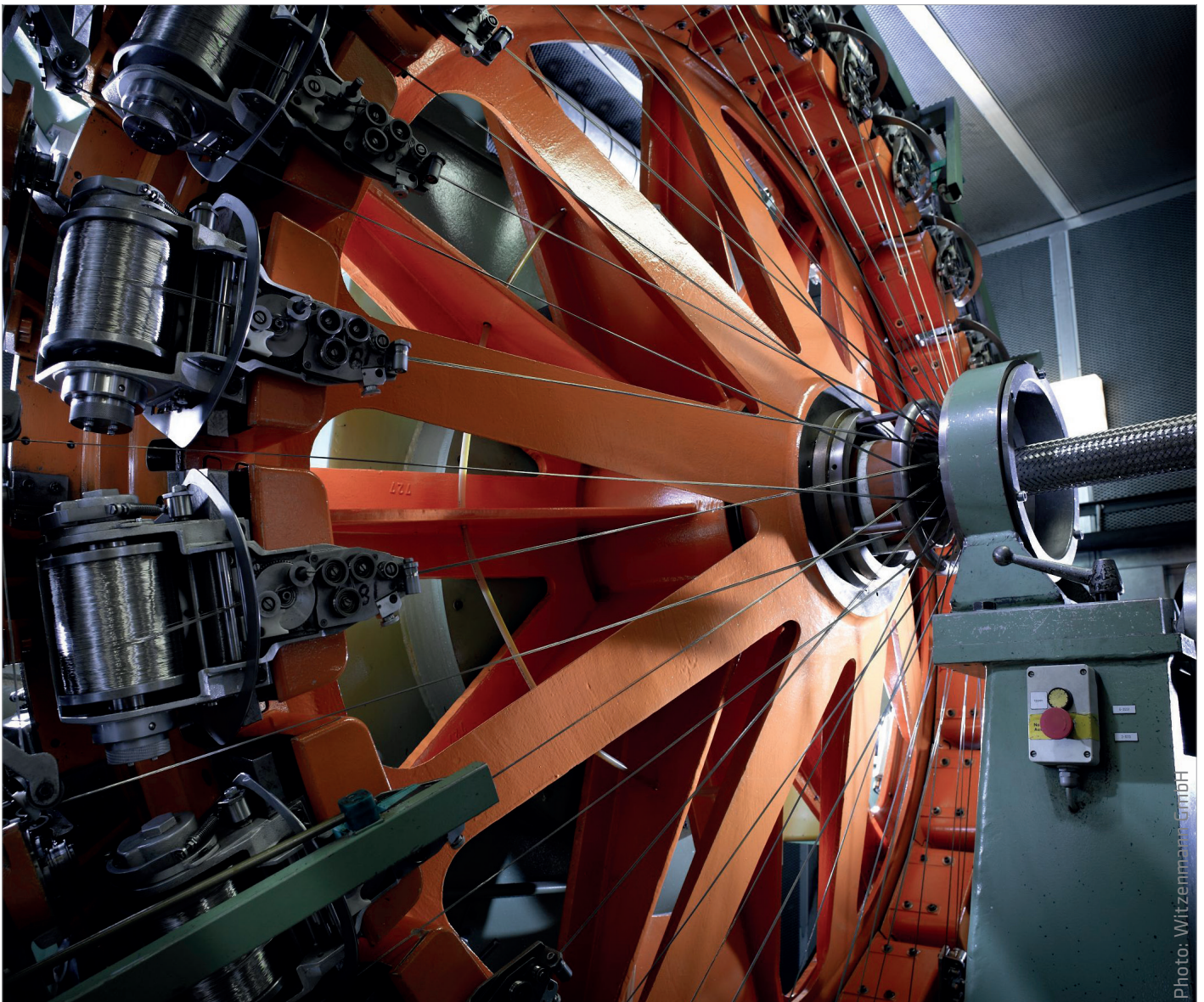


Photo: Witzenmann GmbH

# *From trend-scouting to implementation – the innovation process of a hidden champion*

## **WITZENMANN**

managing flexibility

### **The Company**

- Family-owned enterprise founded in 1854 and based in Pforzheim, Germany
- A pioneer in the metal hose and expansion joints industry
- Global market leader in the area of flexible metallic elements for various industries: automotive, chemistry, medical, building technology, aerospace
- 3,500 employees worldwide, 23 subsidiary companies
- 2,500 patents over the history of the company
- Turnover in 2012: €470 million

### **The Challenge**

- Maintaining market leadership in technology and innovation
- Securing competitive advantages
- Tapping new markets and applications
- Need for a systematic and transparent innovation management

### **The Outcome**

- Fully integrated innovation process including trend-scouting and monitoring of development projects
- Company-wide, integrated platform for innovations, problems, ESS & CIP
- Six-digit savings through suggestions
- Significant increase in process efficiency through tool support

### **The Initial Situation**

In 1885, the founder of the Witzenmann Group, Heinrich Witzenmann, laid the foundation for the metal hose and expansion joint industry and set innovative standards for the family enterprise by inventing the flexible metal hose. As the global market leader, the Pforzheim-based company has obtained more than 2,500 patents, achieving a turnover of over 470 million Euros in 2012 with its broad range of flexible metallic elements for automotive, building technology, aerospace, and other industries.

The Witzenmann Group's Corporate Principles describe the company's pioneering role as a technology and innovation leader in its field. This position is to be maintained primarily by continuously searching for new applications for Witzenmann products. In order to achieve this goal, the company implemented a systematic innovation management process and platform.

### **The Solution**

Planning and implementing this new systematic approach to the innovation program at Witzenmann began in 2007. Key targets of the new solution were increased transparency and improved control of processes, ranging from the analysis of market trends to product development and implementation. In addition to setting up the innovation management system, the team around Torsten Hotop, Head of Industrial Property Protection, was responsible for the company's long-standing Employment Suggestion Scheme (ESS) and the Continuous Improvement Process (CIP). It quickly became clear that a modern software solution was needed to support the innovation process. The same was true for ESS and CIP, which until then had been paper-based. When Torsten Hotop examined the HYPE solution more closely and learned that it allowed for parallel mapping of several different workflows in a single software system, he saw the opportunity that it offered: a joint, company-wide platform for entering, developing and managing innovation, CIP and ESS ideas. In the same year, the decision to acquire the HYPE solution was made, and Hotop's vision was successively implemented over several development stages.

### **HYPE and Witzenmann**

In the course of aligning the innovation management processes, external advisers were consulted. After it was decided that a new IT solution should support the innovation process in the future, potential software suppliers were benchmarked, showing that HYPE offered the best solution for Witzenmann. One pivotal criterion for the swift decision for the HYPE solution was its configurability, which made it possible to map any form of workflow into the system.

Today, HYPE is an integral part of Witzenmann's innovation management efforts and supports the entire innovation process. Thorsten Brecht, Head of Technology and Innovation Management, appreciates the annual HYPE Forum for Innovation Experts: "The customer presentations and the discussions with other HYPE users are a very good opportunity to exchange experiences and best practices."

### ***The Platform in Detail***

Trend-scouting is at the beginning of the innovation process at Witzenmann. Market trends are identified by way of continuous market observation, for example by analyzing trade publications and online forums, or by customer surveys. The various trends identified are collected in the HYPE system, combined into clusters, evaluated and allocated to pre-defined search fields.

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***"Since the new innovation process was still in the making and the need for changes and extensions were merely a question of time, we greatly appreciated the easy and fast adaptability of the software."***

*Torsten Hotop, Head of Industrial Property Protection*

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With the help of idea campaigns, the collaborative idea management's content is linked to the trend-scouting content: according to the search fields derived from market trends, suitable campaigns are initiated in order to specifically search for innovative ideas for this area with the support of all employees.

In order to facilitate participation for employees and to avoid using several parallel platforms, Witzenmann opted for a Single-Point-of-Access: The platform "Flexperte Innovation" offers a central place for entering innovation, CIP and ESS ideas. In addition, if problems are recognized, they can be registered in the system without concrete suggestions towards a solution.

Employees that have no access to the company network can submit ideas and problems on paper. They are subsequently entered into the system by a local administrator. Ideas are treated with transparency on the platform. This means that ideas and their current processing status can be seen and discussed by all participants. This way, other colleagues can propose solutions to a submitted problem.

In the next phase, the team around Thorsten Brecht decides for each new submission what kind of idea or problem it represents, classifies it according to several criteria, and allocates it to the respective workflow in the system. Afterwards, the colleagues responsible for the next steps



*Thorsten Brecht,  
Head of Technology and  
Innovation Management*



## From trend-scouting to implementation



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***“On average we have one significant suggestion for improvement per year, which results in up to six-digit savings.”***

*Thorsten Brecht, Head of Technology and Innovation Management*

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are notified by the system. In the case of ESS ideas, this may concern a benefit reward calculation, while innovation ideas may concern a feasibility analysis or reviews. After the ideas have been evaluated, the most promising concepts are transferred into the project workflow – also on the HYPE platform. This is where the entire process management for the implementation of innovation ideas takes place.

### ***The Results***

The aim – developing systematic innovation management with transparent processes and clear decision-making paths – was achieved. Today, the entire innovation process, from trend-scouting to implementation, is managed on HYPE. The platform also maps the ESS workflow. Currently, there are about 1,000 ideas in the system. 240 of these are innovation ideas, with the remainder representing ESS or CIP suggestions. From the employees' perspective, the integrated platform and idea entry form bring improved user-friendliness, because they can submit all kinds of ideas in a single familiar system. The comprehensive solution also has several advantages from an innovation management perspective: There is only a single system to learn, and the central database makes searching and presenting content fast and easy. Creating reports and analyses, and seamlessly linking the various workflows together, is also made simple by having it contained on a single platform. Employees are highly interested in exchanging ideas: when the system was opened up to all staff in June 2013, 300 new users registered themselves soon after. At the same time, a first idea campaign was run. Within three weeks, 30 ideas were submitted, eleven of which are being pursued after evaluation. Brecht is very pleased with the campaign's results and considers the “idea campaign” methodology highly promising. This way, the topic of innovation can be integrated more strongly into company culture, and redirecting the stream of ideas towards the search fields identified through trend-scouting can be improved.

Also, there is an appetite to apply the HYPE platform in more ways: Due to the positive experience with the platform, it is to be rolled out in stages at Witzemann's 23 subsidiary companies.



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