

A family-owned business on the global market: Fritz Kübler GmbH

#### Top Priority **SIL**

Safety standards like SIL were declared a top priority at management level by the Kübler company. The Kübler customer days in Schweningen not only focused on "Safety in Automation", but in addition a new 2500 m<sup>2</sup> large production area with the latest state-of-the art manufacturing plant was inaugurated.

"It is impressive to see the fundamental change in our company over the past ten years," declared Gebhard Kübler on 10<sup>th</sup> October, regarding the overall development of the Fritz Kübler GmbH company, which he manages together with his brother Lothar. A success which can easily be put into figures: "We have grown from a 7 million Euro company to a 30 million Euro company."

#### **Kübler Customer Days on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> October 2008**

On 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> October the company, founded in 1960 by Fritz Kübler, invited over 100 international guests, customers, experts and representatives of the press to its headquarters in the Schubertstrasse in Villingen-Schwenningen. Within the framework of the Kübler Customer Days a rich variety of technological demonstrations, lectures, speeches, festivities as well as entertainment were on offer. In particular a new 2500 m<sup>2</sup> facility that includes an R&D centre was inaugurated. One of the central themes of the Kübler festivities was Safety in Automation. A podium discussion on the afternoon of the 10<sup>th</sup> October was specially dedicated to this, with highly-distinguished experts from industrial organizations and businesses. The 6-man team of experts spent three hours with lectures and discussion forums, finding the fine balance between required standards such as SIL, the Safety Integrity Level, over-the-top rules and regulations and sensible safety features.

#### **Top Priority at management level: "Safety in Automation"**

The question of "Safety in Automation" is currently very much in vogue and is also being given top priority at management level in the Kübler company. Lothar Kübler had already made this point very clear in his welcoming speech, when he drew a comparison between the Safety Integrity Level SIL in the field of automation and the routine safety precautions that are taken for granted today. He concluded: "Just as no-one today would think of driving a car without wearing a seatbelt or letting his children ride a bicycle without wearing a safety-helmet, then functional safety in an industrial environment will take hold and grow to become the accepted standard."

Dr. Dirk Clemens sang from the same hymn sheet when he stated: "SIL is something our customers are really talking about!" The Sales Director of Kübler continued: "Safety in Automation is of absolute ground-breaking importance for our organization."

By steering a course towards SIL, the Swabian manufacturer of counting and sensor technology products is making its position very clear concerning the matter of 'safer encoders as an integral part of safety-aware control concepts', which - the company claims - is an ever-growing demand on the part of their customers.

How far is this new proximity to SIL reflected today in company policy? During the customer days Arnold Hettich gave a clear hint of the 'Kübler Way' when it comes to functional safety, commenting: "You can expect to see something from us in the very near future with specific regard to SIL encoders." In a short preview, the Kübler Product Manager gave a concrete announcement that the Sendix Safety SIL3 - the 'safe, absolute encoder' - would be launched in 2009.

### 2500 new m<sup>2</sup> to be used for Research and Development

Within the framework of the Customer Days, these new ultra-modern production facilities were inaugurated in a proper and befitting manner in the presence of Erika Kübler, the senior partner and wife of the founder of the company. The new building, with its functional design, incorporates state-of-the-art manufacturing equipment: 18 months had elapsed since the first ideas and concepts for the building, which were followed by a construction phase of around only ten months that started in Spring 2007. Two brand-new factory floors appeared, which now house the Research and Development area, as well as a number of high-tech manufacturing lines, plus the good-inwards and dispatch departments. A milestone for Kübler's management, who looking back described the project as follows: "Space was created for expansion and to move the business forward." "2.4 million Euro were invested in the new building as well as 0.4 million in the existing building" (figures provided by the management). This has provided an additional 2500 m<sup>2</sup> of new space, which will now be used for the manufacture of encoders and as a Research and Development centre. The new building is capable of being expanded by a further 60 percent, in other words by 1500 m<sup>2</sup>. A guided tour of the building demonstrated clearly to all the guests the high level of innovative energy that the current 225 employees working on counting and sensor technology possess. Kübler successfully completes two to three major development projects each year, and in the same period of time also implements six significant product modifications and translates 200 special enquiries into concrete products and solutions. Something further also became clear during the tour: there exists absolutely no conflict at the technology company Kübler between Innovation and Kaizen. Even though Kaizen - "small-step improvement" - and innovation - "the large completed novelty" - are often considered as contradictory, the contrary is true. "When an innovation is supported by Kaizen, that innovation can not only be carried out reliably, but it can also, additionally, be improved further". Gebhard Kübler outlined to this magazine this important conclusion, to which the company has come after 5 years of continuous improvement.

### Kaizen, not a project, but a long-term task

Kübler now wants to give a more efficient and broader foundation to its various improvement projects, thanks to a "Kübler Kaizen culture". A "Kaizen-Office", which at present has one member of staff plus an external coach, highlights the seriousness of this company-wide undertaking. The teamwork with many other employees thus allows the implementation of a lasting Kaizen culture at Kübler. "Kaizen is not a project" explains Managing Director Gebhard Kübler, but a long-term task, "only in this way will we be able to maintain long-term employment in Germany".

At Kübler, stickers with red arrows indicate the sectors where improvements are planned in the coming weeks: here a possible source of failure on a piece of equipment, there an unmarked shelf or undefined places for tooling storage. "We definitely still have a long way to go but, according to Kaizen, the way is also the objective" conclude Gebhard and Lothar Kübler, who are firmly convinced of the "return on the considerable investment".

Additional columns and statements:

*"We will be launching the safe absolute encoder." Gebhard F Kübler announces to K&E magazine the definitive arrival of Sendix Safety SIL3 for the year 2009.*

*2.4 million Euro have been invested in the new building - in addition to a further 0.4 million Euro for renovating the existing building.*

*Completed after a construction phase of ten months: the inaugural ribbon was cut on 10<sup>th</sup> October in front of 100 invited guests*

*Finding the fine balance between the requirements of different standards, over-the-top rules and regulations and sensible safety features: the Kübler workshop 'Safety in Automation' showed ways through the maze of current directives*

*"The art of creating a real benefit for your customers"*

*Erika Kübler, the wife of the founder of the company, together with her two sons Lothar and Gebhard, open the latest Kübler customer days.*

The background to the company

The core business of the Fritz Kübler GmbH company is the development, manufacture and marketing of position and movement sensors that are at the forefront of technology, as well as a range of innovative display and counting devices plus a wide selection of connection and transmission products.

The company was founded in 1960 and is run today by the second generation, namely Gebhard and Lothar Kübler. Exports make up over 60 percent of its business and the company is active throughout the world. One of the company's mottos, for example, is "We are promoting Control and Automation - from our headquarters in Villingen-Schwenningen - as a market sector that is both innovative and quality-oriented".

For more information regarding the inauguration of the new plant as well as the expert forum "Safety in Automation", please go to [www.kuebler.com](http://www.kuebler.com) .