

90 years of being ahead

Memmert – a success story from the Metropolitan region of Nuremberg

90 years ago, in a small timber-framed house in the Franconian town of Schwabach (Germany), the history began of the company Memmert – today, the world's leading innovator when it comes to the development of climate and temperature control appliances for applications in R&D, industry and medicine. To-date, it has been a history marked by great boldness, an exceptional level of innovative strength and, last but not least, a healthy dose of adventurous spirit.

This year, Memmert can look back on a 90-year long eventful company history. Ever since it was first founded under the name 'Elektro-Ing-Buero-Willi Memmert', the family company has continuously evolved and, today, stands out as a globally active high-tech specialist. Its climate chambers, heating and drying ovens, incubators, medical devices and water baths are all manufactured in Franconia and their consistent high quality has been instrumental in catapulting the company into the 'Encyclopaedia of German World Market Leaders'.

From Schwabach into the big wide world

When Willi Memmert and his wife Eva-Babette Memmert opened the doors of their small electrical business in their hometown of Schwabach over 90 years ago, they had no idea that 15 years later they would have dealings with customers on the other side of the planet. Nor did they imagine that they would be cooperating closely with associates in India and Egypt in order to expand their business interests there and lay the foundation for future long-term partnerships. What's more, all without speaking a word of English. Nonetheless, the entrepreneur Willi Memmert was convinced that there was a market for his flagship product beyond the borders of Germany and he fully intended to tap into it.

The foundation for success

In 1947, the trained electrical engineer was commissioned by the Red Cross to manufacture a hot-air steriliser – the 'Aeolus'. It was used to keep syringes and other medical equipment germ-free thereby playing an active role in curtailing epidemics and diseases. The success

proved the company founder right: by the mid-1950s, the company Memmert was already exporting its appliances internationally. And when business partners from distant places came to visit and joined the Memmert family for dinner at their family home, Willi Memmert's daughter, Grete, was allowed to stay home from school. To translate.

Then we'll just have to improvise...

This is just one of many examples that illustrates the role improvisation and practical organisational talent has played on Memmert's journey from small family business to globally operating enterprise, today exporting to more than 160 different countries around the world. It was also this pragmatic approach that resulted in the development of the 'Aeolus' back in 1947. In those days, raw materials were scarce. Willi Memmert therefore built the prototype from recycled aluminium from old aircraft parts. His methods for recruiting new staff were also unconventional: he was known to make offers to farm labourers if they looked hard-working and, if job-seekers going from door-to-door in search of work came by, it was not uncommon for him to tell them "You can start tomorrow". Employees have described the company founder as a person for whom everyone had great respect – on occasion, customers have referred to him as a 'universal genius', able to come up with a solution to any problem.

"Here's what we need: ..."

"Our developments are responses to the suggestions and requirements of our customers," says Christiane Riefler-Karpa, the company founder's granddaughter and managing director since the year 2007. "We deliver the solutions." Having initially served the medical segment with its forerunner 'Aeolus', the company Memmert gradually began to receive more and more enquiries from a wider variety of industries. Whether research, pharmaceutical, cosmetics or foodstuff industry: throughout the era of economic miracle, the demand for accurate climate and temperature control technology was high. The innovation cycles of the originally small family business became increasingly shorter.

Aeolus and other milestones

The cornerstone of the company's success was the 'Aeolus'. This was followed in the 1950s by another milestone: a mechanical controller which, for those days, offered exceptionally high precision. The temperature could be set via a control knob with an accuracy of less than ± 0.5 °C. Equally as revolutionary: the world's most accurate temperature control appliance with all-round heating system – the first product launched by the future global player. This was a technical innovation with heating coils placed in pressed swages in its inner chamber which meant that, for the very first time, it was possible to construct a heating oven that wasn't round, but square – which made it infinitely more practical. The following decade saw a drive for the establishment of a series production to enable the output of significantly higher quantities. The 1970s and 80s focused on automating manufacturing methods and perfecting product design.

In 1976, management of the company was passed on to the next generation. Daughters Grete Memmert-Riefler and Herta Ulrich and their respective husbands took over leadership of the firm after the death of Willi Memmert. They recognised the potential offered by advancing globalisation and paved the way for their open-minded company to tap into new markets all over the world.

A new breakthrough every ten years

This was the era in which Memmert again brought an absolute innovation in temperature control technology onto the market: as one of the first manufacturers worldwide, Memmert complemented its product range with in-house developed electronic controllers. The next time Memmert took on a pioneering role within the industry was in the year 2000, when it launched the first cooled incubators with Peltier technology. Not only does this technology offer top accuracy in the operation of climate and temperature control appliances, it is also highly impressive when it comes to energy efficiency and cost-effectiveness. What's more, the implementation of Peltier technology clearly reflects the fact that Memmert attaches great importance to the issues of sustainability and environmental protection – both in word and deed.

The company constantly strives to develop products which offer the highest level of efficiency and environmental compatibility. This, in turn, enables sustainable business

practices for Memmert's customers too. Furthermore, this underlines the fact that Memmert is an absolute pioneer when it comes to sustainability.

Particularly noteworthy are the two device generations from 2003 and 2012 which were instrumental in defining industrial standards in terms of functionality, accuracy and ease of use for both laboratory and industrial applications. It therefore comes as no surprise that Memmert is celebrating this year's anniversary under the motto '90 years of being ahead'.

Into the future

Meanwhile, Memmert ovens have arrived in the future. A specially developed software enables the latest generation of appliances to be programmed remotely and networked with one another. From afar, from a home-office desk, with a tablet, from anywhere in the world. Another logical development, which resulted not least from the increasingly networked nature of the company itself: in 2010, Memmert established a distribution company in China, followed by another one in India in 2012. More have followed in the USA and Eastern Europe. There are separate teams for Germany, France, Spain and the United Kingdom. "We maintain relationships with many of our customers that go back decades, in some cases over generations," says Christiane Riefler-Karpa. "The trust our customers place in us is the most valuable aspect of our company's capital." And it is for these customers that Memmert will continue to give its best in the future.

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