

Being 'SMART' in Germany's Black Forest

When you hold this issue of TELE-satellite in your hands the company Smart Electronic will only have been in existence for less than a year. It doubtlessly is a very young company, but still it can boast its own production facilities and dedicated sales channels. How can a start-up business develop so fast? That's exactly what we wanted to find out when we set out on our journey to the south-western corner of Germany, home of the world-famous Black Forest cuckoo clocks and a by-word for precision and the art of craftsmanship.

■ The two Smart managing directors Peter Löble (left) and Christoph Hoefler (right) on the roof of the company's business premises. Christoph Hoefler has been active in the field of satellite technology since 1988. Starting as a radio and television technician he moved on to the purchasing and sales department of a specialised electronics store before starting as field manager for Nokia. In 2005 he finally became head of sales at Wela and with the foundation of Smart Electronic his new job was managing director there. Peter Löble, the second managing director, has been working in the satellite field since 1997. He also worked for an electronics store and joined Wela in 2001 as product manager. Both have known each other since 1997 and consider themselves a great team.

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Christoph Hoefler und Peter Löble are the two managing directors of Smart and they give a brief account of the run-up to the current business: Smart Electronic was spun off of the long-running trading company Wela Electronic at the beginning of 2008. At the same time Smart also took over a fully operational manufacturing site for assembling satellite receivers from third-party components. Incidentally, satellite receivers make up only one segment of the complete product range. "We also supply LNBS, multi-switches and mounting material, which means we can offer everything a specialised satellite dealer needs," explains Peter Löble.

Christoph Hoefler then continues by providing some insight into how the company performed in the first year of business. "We had anticipated a first-year turnover along the lines of 20 million EUR, with a 10% increase for 2009." All employees that had been involved in satellite technology were taken over from Wela Electronic. According to Christoph Hoefler "30 employees work in receiver manufacturing, while 15 members of staff take care of sales and 10 persons work in administration." The marketing department was set up from scratch and already has a head count of four members of staff. Smart is in expansion mode, that's for sure!

So what are the actual goals of expansion? Peter Löble summarises the company's markets as follows. "Some 50% of sales are generated in Germany, 20% each go to Western and Eastern Europe and 10% to North Africa." For 2009 Peter Löble expects some shifting of markets in combination with increased turnover. "We believe that 45% of our sales will go to Germany, 15% to Western Europe, 25% to Eastern Europe and the North African share will rise to 15% as well."

He also explains why he is so optimistic about the development of sales in Northern Africa: "A few months ago we set up a branch there which means we are now able to supply our customers in that region very quickly and with reduced turnaround times."

Smart has a clear focus on receiver production, and this is a segment where the two managing directors also identify the core strengths of Smart. Christoph Hoefler: "We are able to react swiftly to customer demands, because we manufacture our receivers right here in the Black Forest region and therefore are not faced with long and winding delivery channels for our customers in Europe and Northern Africa."

Christoph Hoefler lists some examples: "Depending on the required language we package the appropriate instruction manual or adapt the on-screen menu to the local language." After all, Smart lives by its credo "Connect, watch". Customers need to be happy with their Smart receiver right from the start, which can be guaranteed by

"usability in combination with quality made in the Black Forest," according to Christoph Hoefler, who hits the core of the Smart philosophy with this statement.

Peter Löble visits the sales office in Morocco almost on a monthly basis and he adds that "Smart is open for new sales partners mainly in Europe, but also in non-European countries. We are able to adapt our receivers to local requirements very quickly," he hastens to add.

Even though Smart has only been in existence for less than a year the company is already in the process of developing new products. Some of these will already be available by the time this issue of TELE-satellite is published. "We're introducing a new LNB series with extremely small dimensions," reveals Peter Löble. And



■ View of the production floor: here, the components sourced as cabinets are equipped with tuners. Explains Peter Löble: "This way we are able to cover several markets with a single base unit, depending on the individual market demands and with the added advantage of being able to guarantee quality assurance." Three product ranges are manufactured here: fully fledged HD receivers with CA, CI, USB and VFD display, basic models with limited features and – recently added – LINUX-based receivers.

Christoph Hoefler adds that "these are particularly suited to multi-focus antennas." One of the other innovations is a power pack with ultra-low power consumption of only one Watt in standby mode. As far as multi-switches are concerned Peter Löble explains that "we will also launch a Unicable-compatible multi-switch", which will allow users to connect up to eight Unicable-compatible receivers to a single Quattro LNB. "This will surely be a big thing in future," Peter Löble enthusiastically adds, because "using a Unicable setup you can simply connect one receiver to another."

Speaking of usability, Christoph Hoefler explains that "all of our receivers are equipped with RAPS." This means they are constantly kept up to date – new satellite channels are added automatically to

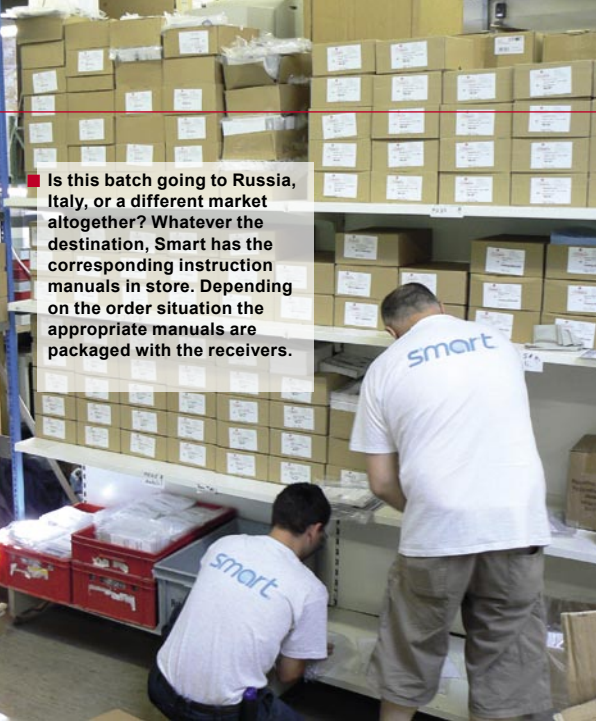
the channel list. "The RAPS signal is currently transmitted via ASTRA, but will also be available via HOTBIRD shortly." As long as a receiver catches signals from one of these positions it will stay up to date without users having to worry about a thing.

When you consider the enthusiasm and high spirits of the two Smart managing directors you can be sure that innovation will go a long way at Smart. The Black Forest based company is well on the way to becoming a recognised quality manufacturer of satellite technology.

The business premises of Smart Electronic in St. Georgen, smack in the middle of Germany's Black Forest.



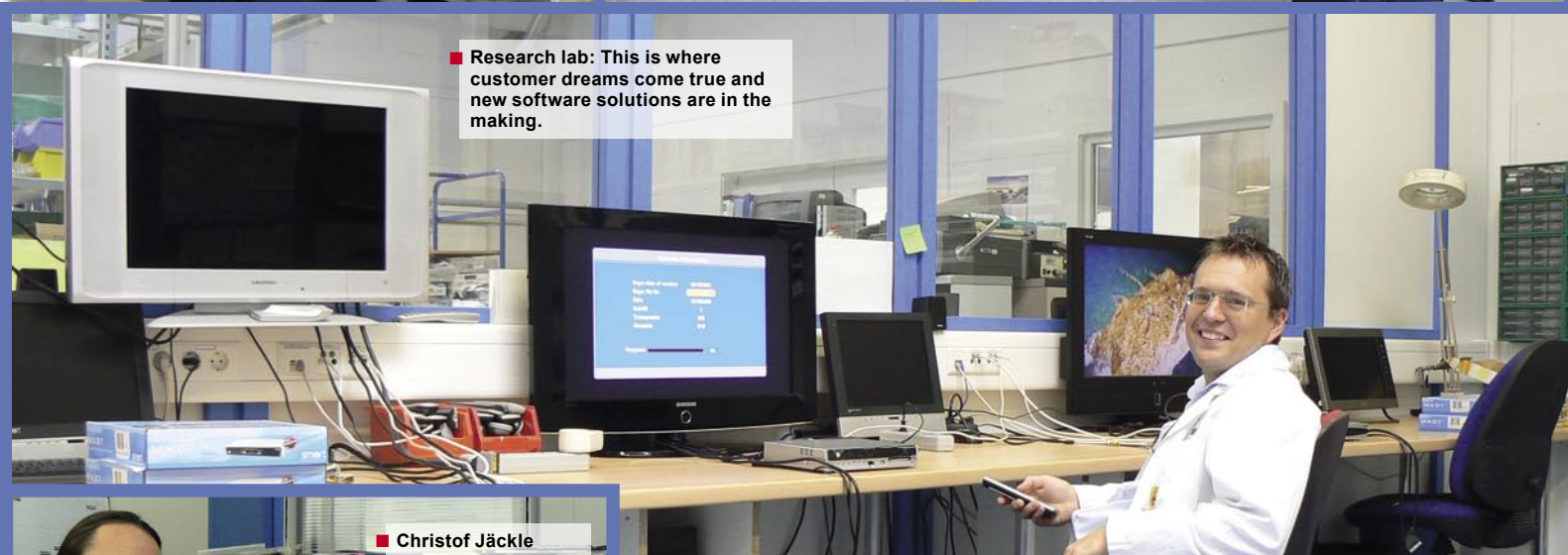
■ Each receiver is individually tested and given ■ a dedicated serial number.



■ Is this batch going to Russia, Italy, or a different market altogether? Whatever the destination, Smart has the corresponding instruction manuals in store. Depending on the order situation the appropriate manuals are packaged with the receivers.



■ View of the warehouse: Apart from receivers Smart also offers complete packages, such as for camping.



■ Research lab: This is where customer dreams come true and new software solutions are in the making.



■ Christof Jäckle does not only take care of technical documentations but also designs the packaging. The Smart energy logo – as seen on his monitor – is one of his creations.



■ The sales room: From here, Smart stays in touch with customers from all over the world.

