

Germany

## Integrated Solutions from One Source: AZO Automates Processing of Large, Medium and Small Components in Granular, Powder and Liquid Form

For 70 years now, the AZO Group based in Osterburken/DE has been working in material handling. From the initial draft design through innovative individual components for storage, discharge, screening, conveying, dosing and weighing of raw materials to turnkey solutions and entire plants, plant engineering, process engineering and automation, all elements are perfectly tuned to each other and without interfaces, with solutions being supplied as a complete package from one source.

AZO is worldwide the Number 1 in feeding of mixing processes and a specialist in innovative process IT and automation solutions in the production environment. AZO LIQUIDS GmbH was established in 2008 as zoatec GmbH. This business unit is a specialist in innovative systems for dispersion, mixing and homogenization of liquid and semi-solid products. Besides industries like the plastics, chemicals, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals as well as the foodstuffs and dairy industries, bulk solids handling in the ceramics/minerals segment is developing very well, which was underpinned at ceramitec 2018.

Dieter Huspenina (DH), Chief Sales Officer of the AZO Group and member of the Executive Board, gave us an insight into the company's business activities and strategy.



**Fig. 1** AZO Group's headquarters in Osterburken

**cfi:** *The number of the supplied industry branches is manifold. Are there segments that have especially furthered the growth of the AZO Group?*

**DH:** In this context, I need to mention quite a few that have been relevant over the last 70 years. AZO has its beginnings in the bakery industry, and back in 1952 exhibited for the first time at a leading trade fair in the bakery branch.

In the following years, AZO has always set itself the task of identifying the needs of producing companies in many branches and ultimately of meeting them. In the following decades, branches like the confectionery industry, the pharmaceuticals and chemicals industries, but also niches like beverage production, construction chemicals, Additive Manufacturing and not least Technical Ceramics have been responsible for the

success of AZO. With this broad basis for AZO Group, AZO has gained great expertise in the handling of a wide range of bulk solids.

**cfi:** *How has the international presence of the AZO Group developed in the course of the years? What markets are particularly relevant and where do you see particular opportunities for growth?*

**DH:** Thanks to the large number of trade fair participations at the leading trade fairs established in Germany, the company's export share has grown. Besides steadily cultivating the German market, the company founder Adolf Zimmermann, together with his wife Marianne, initiated the founding of a company in the USA in 1978.

In the 1990s and at the beginning of the new millennium, there followed the establishment of companies in Belgium, France, China, Thailand, Great Britain and Russia. In addition to these important markets for AZO, we see further opportunities for growth for the EMEA region.

**cfi:** *In the context of global activities, what is your strategy for machine engineering in respect of Germany as a production base and the depth of production?*

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**Fig. 2** AZO COMPONENTER® for the fully automatic weighing and charge supply of components



**Fig. 4** AZO ManDos® – the operator-guided manual weighing station

**DH:** The depth of production at Osterburken is extremely high. All components and equipment are manufactured and assembled in Osterburken. An exception to this are only turnkey components such as blowers, vacuum pumps, etc., which are bought in from market leaders in Germany. To supply plants for our customers as flexibly as possible and specific to projects,

some parts of the plants and systems are produced on site. Always strictly in line with the AZO Group's quality standards. The key components like, for example, the cyclone screener, are manufactured exclusively at the site in Osterburken. The software and hardware for automation of the plants come mainly from the sites in Germany, mostly from the main plant in

Osterburken. Depending on market requirements and regulations, automation is also configured on site. The management of the AZO Group attaches great value to independence and at the same time flexibility in the manufacture of our products and in engineering. Thanks to the consistent quality of the products and services associated with this as well as the reduction of interfaces within a plant, our customers profit a great deal from this depth of production.

**cfi:** *What objectives do the international sites have?*

**DH:** The international sites are primarily service and sales companies. This enables us to support our customers quickly and competently within the scope of after-sales service but also in consultation on process engineering. Besides replacement parts, individual components are stored on site. Depending on the size of the site, up to around 100 employees are on hand for our customers. Customer proximity, fast available service and engineering are ensured internationally by AZO's companies abroad.

**cfi:** *How can the ceramics industry profit from the extensive expertise in the AZO Group?*

**DH:** In many areas of the ceramics industry, AZO has experience as a contact part-



**Fig. 3** AZO RoLog® – the robot for fully automatic charge supply and weighing of minor and small amounts of components

ner when it comes to bulk solids handling, process engineering and automation in the batch processes predominant there.

Tracking and tracing of the batches produced and a consistently high quality in product preparation and weighing of the different raw materials are everything in the manufacturing process. In the manufacture of, for example, diesel particulate filters, the key raw material is the abrasive silicon carbide that has to be screened to grain sizes of 150 µm. A lots of additives have to be accurately weighed in small quantities, for example, to ±5 g.

Innovative systems like the AZO COMPONENTER®, the newly developed AZO RoLog® or manual weighing systems like the AZO ManDos® are solutions that guarantee both the quality of the batch as well as the necessary protection of the operator. These and other requirements can be realised as part of project engineering together

with the requirements in respect of automation by AZO from one source. But also in areas like the coating of clay roofing tiles and household ceramics as well as in the production of ceramic seals and medical ceramics, AZO plants are used.

**cfi:** *With 35 years of experience in process IT and automation, how do you see the opportunities for advancing Industry 4.0?*

**DH:** We see Industry 4.0 as a sub-discipline of digitalization and therefore it holds great importance in our company. And that not just since today, but already since the start of our business in process IT.

However, other focuses are added today, These are found in networking, decentralisation and modularisation. Data analytics and artificial intelligence are making inroads into our systems. The set-up of industry 4.0 components and a uniform labelling system form the basis for the digital twin, on which we are also working. Industry 4.0 projects



**Fig. 5** AZO's 4P-Model for digitalization

serve both our own products, as well as our own production and the products and production of our customers. That is reflected in the 4P Model of the AZO Group.

**cfi:** *Thank you for talking to us.* KS

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