

"We have to listen closely"

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Dr. Andreas Echelmeyer, Director Conveying & Loading Systems, BEUMER Group

Dr. Echelmeyer, you have been Director of Conveying & Loading Systems at BEUMER Group in Beckum for a few months now. What are your responsibilities and what would you like to achieve?

Dr. Andreas Echelmeyer: Since August 2015, I have been the head of the new Center of Competence (CoC) for Conveying & Loading Systems (CL Systems) segment. Under the leadership of the CoC, we would like to globally develop and implement complex system solutions for various industries, such as the mining and raw materials industries, and port handling. In order to achieve this, the customers have to notice us in those fields. BEUMER is known for providing innovative intralogistics solutions. Some are still surprised to learn how fast the BEUMER Group has grown in recent years. Today Beumer now also offers complex system solutions in the raw materials industry, a sector in which business was traditionally limited to sales of single machines. Our goal is to become internationally known as a reliable partner in the area of plant engineering as well. We have fewer inquiries from Germany, and increasingly more from Australia, the Far East, Africa, South America and the US. Our mission is to build an international team for Conveying & Loading Systems that works together on specific projects. In order to ensure a high standard internationally, we must get qualified colleagues from all our local companies on board in all regions.

Qualified means that they have to understand the customers in order to precisely communicate their needs with us and develop the perfect solution together with our team in Beckum. This means that we need to stay curious and open-minded for this type of teamwork.

What has changed now for BEUMER Group with the introduction of the CL Systems segment?

Dr. Andreas Echelmeyer: We are rooted in material handling, which is specifically about the efficient movement of bulk materials. Each industry we serve has very specific requirements however. The cement industry, for example, relies increasingly on alternative fuels and raw materials to reduce the use of expensive primary fuels, such as coal and oil. This can also be achieved with household waste that is processed for a particular application. Due to the differing composition of this material, its handling is often very complex. We consult with our customers based on our extensive knowledge of system solutions and provide entire

systems, starting from receiving the material at the factory gate, to storing, mixing, conveying and introducing it into the cement production process via the main burner or calcinator.

How do you define expertise in system solutions for your work?

Dr. Andreas Echelmeyer: In order to customise a solution, we have to listen very carefully and ask the right questions. These are often questions the customer has not even thought about. Some customers can also have very specific ideas about the solution. Together we analyse the task, and in this dialogue the user learns that we can supply the perfect system solution that can sometimes differ considerably from the original ideas. Our main goal is to understand the user. Another important prerequisite for us as a system manufacturer is flexibility. In order to successfully tackle specific tasks, we sometimes have to learn to let go of established solutions and find an entirely new approach, depending on the application.

How do you get in contact with the users?

Dr. Andreas Echelmeyer: Our globally operating colleagues are in close contact with our customers. We are constantly exchanging ideas. Our local colleagues are familiar with the country-specific customs, speak the language and know the market and customer-specific requirements. They can pinpoint the relevant potentials and priority areas. Ideally, the customers themselves approach us at an early stage. Together, we then develop the perfect system. If a new customer comes to us, we will send out experts from our Beckum site in Germany. A team from the local company, accompanied by experts from the CoC, will then discuss the problem in detail with the customer. As a third possibility, the customer sends us a request for quotation. We analyse and examine the request in regards to completeness, and whether all of our questions have been sufficiently answered, and then we evaluate the request. Together with our local colleagues from the responsible group company, we then develop a fitting solution.

Your administrative field is called Center of Competence (CoC), the globally centralised organisation within a matrix structure. Do you also work together with other CoCs?

Dr. Andreas Echelmeyer: In the case of orders from the cement industry, for example, we work closely with our colleagues from the CoC Cement. We can mutually benefit from our respective expertise. Those collaborations are always project-specific.

From which industries do you get requests?

Dr. Andreas Echelmeyer: This can vary a lot, because our system solutions are used wherever you need to transport large quantities of bulk material. This is particularly the case for the ore and raw materials industry,

but we also deal with applications outside of these core areas, such as food transport. In ports, for example, we ensure that different materials are efficiently loaded onto ships.

What skills are you looking for in your colleagues?

Dr. Andreas Echelmeyer: As you can imagine, the engineers for this task are very experienced and highly qualified, and are able to think outside the box. Often they need to find new ways in order to find the perfect system solution. Particularly with large conveyor systems, the demands on engineers are becoming increasingly complex. Public acceptance of road transport by truck is declining throughout the world, which means that our conveyors have to deal with greater and greater challenges in overcoming topography. For example, we are designing systems with a length of more than 12 km that transport material over extremely steep inclines and declines – and without transferring material on the way.

If we don't want to send an expedition team first, we will have to use special software that allows us to merge satellite and aerial images of different resolutions with the respective topographical data. The challenge now for my colleagues is to estimate and analyse the project, in order to make a concrete offer to the customer. We usually don't have a lot of time for this. It is only possible with an excellent global team.

What experiences do you bring into your new position?

Dr. Andreas Echelmeyer: I am familiar with the system manufacturing side, as well as the user side. I was working in the cement industry for eight years. As production manager, I had to oversee complex systems that manufacture more than 13,000 tons of steel per day. This is how I am familiar with the demands on system manufacturing coming from the users. I then switched sides and have now worked in systems manufacturing for twelve years. During this time I have set up a global customer support division, among other activities, and I therefore know the expectations of customers: they have ever increasing demands on machine availability and, therefore, on customer support.

How would you assess the current development for plant design in mining?

Dr. Andreas Echelmeyer: The prices for raw materials like iron ore or copper have been extremely low for the last two or three years now. This is why the market situation is very difficult at the moment. We feel the effects of companies cutting investments and stopping projects. We expect this low level of investment to continue for another two, three years, until the market stabilises. What else has changed? There is a general trend towards larger tonnages and throughputs because larger production facilities are more efficient. Many users don't want to set up several parallel systems, but want to cover their entire requirements with one line

or as few as possible. This trend influences considerably the development of our systems.

Today, the trend is towards a comprehensive product portfolio in order to offer complete solutions for the entire production process to the customer. Do all components come from BEUMER?

Dr. Andreas Echelmeyer: We want to offer comprehensive services to our customers, so that we can also avoid unnecessary interfaces. This is why we deliver everything from one single source. For many of the components that are not part of our portfolio, we always ask ourselves whether to purchase or manufacture them in-house. For gear units and electric motors, as well as systems to quantify material flows, we use selected partners. We also attend trade shows to get a clear picture of the current market developments. It's the only way to make sure to provide the perfect solution to our customer in terms of profitability. It is not uncommon for plant manufacturers to purchase many of the components. This way we focus on our core competence and always provide the perfect solutions. Our goal is to always supply turn-key systems that allow the customer to work efficiently.

Are you planning on becoming an EPC (Engineering, Procurement and Construction) company for bulk material – or even an EPCM (Engineering, Procurement and Construction Management) supplier for large-scale plants, also in order to avoid interfaces?

Dr. Andreas Echelmeyer: Not necessarily. As plant manufacturers, we want to focus more on the required system solutions and less on industrial construction, excavation and concrete construction. In addition, climate conditions and legislation can vary greatly from China to Tierra del Fuego, Australia or Alaska. This is why for every project we decide if we will be the single provider or if we will work together with a reliable partner in the region. Local partners are familiar with their environment and the pricing, and are usually well connected. We always want to be well aware of the interfaces. We usually decide on a case by case basis whether or not to use a local partner. We keep a very close eye on the EPC topic, however.

Our customers appreciate that we are a competent expert. They don't want to buy a tunnel or a foundation. They want a system that solves their problems.

Source: BEUMER Group