

BUCHER EMHART GLASS: A NAME FOR THE FUTURE

On 30 September 2013, Emhart Glass announced its new name, Bucher Emhart Glass, along with a new logo and visual identity. We spoke to senior executives at the company to learn more about the repositioning of the brand and the company's current commercial and technical priorities.



NIS machine at Wiegand Glas Germany

Since becoming part of Bucher Industries in 1998, Emhart Glass has been described as 'a Bucher company'. The new name, Bucher Emhart Glass, makes the connection with the parent group much clearer.

'We believe that Bucher Industries is the best possible owner for us,' says Martin Jetter, President of Bucher Emhart Glass. 'They share our long-term strategic perspective and they are a long-established, financially strong group. Our own brand, Emhart Glass, represents a long history of innovation and engineering excellence in the glass industry. Together, we think they're an unbeatable combination.'

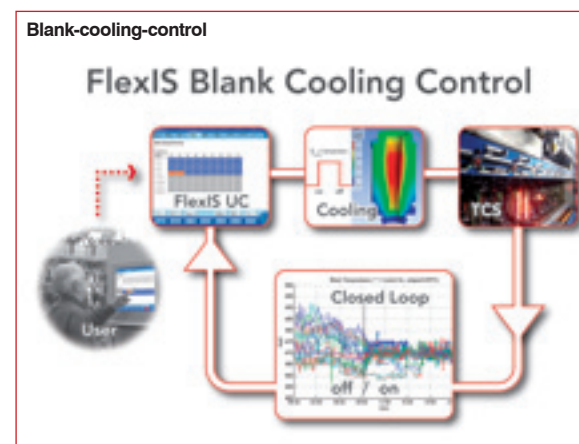
So far, customer reaction has been either neutral or positive across the board. 'This change is good news for our customers, because it denotes continuity, consistency and stability,' explains Martin. 'All the other Bucher brands, Kuhn excepted, have already taken this step over the last few years. That's why we felt it would be good for us too, and strengthen our position in the market. And we haven't given up the Emhart Glass name, of course – it's still there in our brand, as it has been for over 60 years.'

Powerful alliance

Bucher Emhart Glass is part of the Container Glass Alliance, along with Zippe, Horn Glass Industries and MSK. Together, the partners in the alliance collaborate to develop turnkey glass plants for customers, including not only the equipment that makes up a production line but also the services required to achieve a smooth and successful startup. (More details are at www.glass-alliance.com)

'I personally believe that in order to realize its full potential, the glass industry needs to give up its traditional competitive mindset,' says Martin Jetter. 'Our real competitors are not other machine suppliers, or other glass plants, but other packaging materials. Closer collaboration is a good move for our whole industry, whether that means glass plants or their technology suppliers.'

'Glass manufacturing is always a big investment, whether as a greenfield project or a redevelopment, and a high risk too. The Container Glass Alliance can significantly reduce that risk by coordinating engineering efforts and guaranteeing success. We believe that's a major benefit for our customers – and a competitive advantage for us too.'



Hardglass in focus

Matthias Kümmerle, VP Technology at Bucher Emhart Glass, outlines the firm's main priorities for research at the moment. 'Hardglass is our biggest single project,' he says. 'Basically, it allows manufacturers to strengthen glass, which means containers can be either stronger, with less chance of breaking if they are dropped, or lighter, while maintaining the original strength. Our first fully functioning industrial production line is up and running at a plant of our partners, Vetropack, in Austria, and should go into commercial production in Spring 2014.'

'Besides hardglass, we're looking at process control and automation, developing tools that help glassmakers run their production process within tighter limits, in order to meet quality demands,' continues Matthias. 'Our aim is to replace manual control loops, such as operators monitoring temperatures and adjusting production parameters, with fully automated processes.'

'Another key area for us is cooling – finding new and better ways to cool glass containers after they're formed, which is a vital step of the production process,' Matthias adds. 'We're looking at capacity improvement, or removing more heat in the same time, and also new configurations that deliver more targeted and controllable cooling.'

'Finally, ergonomics and operator safety are becoming more and more important. We're developing new human-machine interfaces that mean users can interact with our technology in a simpler way, while maintaining or even increasing the level of safety.'

Growth potential

Bucher Emhart Glass has much to be optimistic about, but Martin Jetter is realistic about the prospects for growth in the glass-packaging industry over the next 12 months. 'To be honest, the growth potential in terms of new investment in glass plants is somewhat limited,' he admits. 'In recent years, the emerging economies of South America, China, and Middle East have driven growth, but now we're seeing them struggling too. China, for example, recorded several years of double-digit growth, but that's now at a much less significant level. As a result, all regions are being much more prudent with their investments. So business is still developing nicely, but slowly.'

Manufacturer support

With the rise of PET seemingly held up by increased health concerns over chemical release, and broader environmental concerns, we're interested to discuss how Bucher Emhart Glass sees its role in terms of supporting manufacturers and, ultimately, encouraging consumers to choose glass.

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'Obviously, we're happy to see glass increasing in popularity in certain segments,' affirms Matthias Kümmerle. 'We see our primary role as helping our customer compete in this industry. By supplying new technology, equipment and services, we can help them meet their own customers' demands.'

Matthias goes on to outline three key issues faced by Bucher Emhart Glass customers. 'Firstly, the quality requirements imposed by fillers and brands are always increasing,' he explains. 'For example, companies like Heineken stipulate very tight tolerances for the weight of their bottles, which is a challenge for manufacturers. We try to give manufacturers solutions to help them run their processes in a more controlled way, so they can meet those demands.'

Some glass-container markets are seeing more and more demand for flexibility, which suggests new directions for Bucher Emhart Glass' products. 'A wider variety of containers need to be produced, which means glass plants need to accommodate short production runs,' says Matthias. 'They need flexible machines that can produce a wide range of wares, while also supporting quick job changes and returning quickly to a steady state afterwards. Our role is to provide equipment that provides this flexibility.'

The final factor, perhaps inevitably, is price pressure. 'Our customers are always competing on price,' affirms Matthias. 'Our technology helps to increase their output and reduce losses along the production line, through improvements such as new cooling methods, which allow machines to run faster.'

Looking ahead

To wrap up our interview, we ask Martin Jetter to paint a picture of his 'Perfect 2014'. 'It's probably just as well that God didn't allow us to see the future!' he laughs. 'It means we can take our work one day at a time and respond to unexpected challenges as they arise. But we are very positive about 2014, and beyond – not because we expect a significant economic recovery, but because our product portfolio and service offering are competitive and fit for purpose. So while I'm not sure what 2014 will bring, I am sure that we're ready for it.'



First BIS machine at Nampak South Africa