



Suckow & Fischer

A company with the courage to invest!

In times of stagnant economic growth, many companies drop their plans to make investments. There are, on the other hand, future-looking, courageous companies that, despite all adversities, make a commitment to modernization or even go as far as adding new expertise in manufacturing and engineering. An example is

Suckow & Fischer, a leading manufacturer of ceiling systems, which made the decision to install a complete powder coating line in its Biebesheim facility. Company president Rainer Fisher discusses the motivation for this decision and describes the development process behind this bold, future-oriented major investment.

Suckow & Fischer is a leader in the development and manufacture of ceiling systems. What sets your product range and services apart?

Our company began in 1966 as a commercial enterprise involved in the development, marketing and sales of ceiling substructure systems made of metal, and after a only short time it was supplying the largest manufacturers with specially designed panels and cladding. In 1995 in Hong Kong, Suckow & Fischer was the first to furnish a subway station exclusively with customized materials. With

that, we became known in the market as specialists for fulfilling custom requests.

Since then, through our work in a multitude of projects, we have gained a great engineering knowledge that we repeatedly take advantage of and use in major projects such as the Munich Airport and the Dubai Airport. Today we are known in the marketplace as problem-solvers, especially when it comes to completing critical projects.

What are the key strengths of your family-run company?

We are able to react fast and flexibly to special requirements and can make decisions more quickly through our flat hierarchy. Thanks to our extensive experience, we take a holistic approach to our projects. We don't simply manufacture ceiling elements for our customers, but rather we support them as a systems supplier as early as in the project-planning phase by suggesting the most cost-effective solutions. In doing so, even during the development phase we take into consideration where the systems will be delivered and which personnel will be responsible for the installation. The qualifications of personnel on the construction site, local demands on corrosion protection as well as on-site guidelines are only a few points that we consider early in the development process. This expertise generated in working with our customers provides added-value across the entire process.

In a difficult economic environment you invested in a complete powder coating system. What caused you to take this bold step?

Ceiling panels are among the most optically challenging components. To meet our own extremely high standards, we decided to expand our in-house expertise in surface-treatment technology. By doing so, we moved quality control in-house to be more flexible in processing orders



The pre- and post-coating stations are equipped with the latest generation of hand-operated units and can be put to use flexibly.



With its modern powder coating system, Suckow & Fischer has brought expertise in surface-treatment technology into the company and can respond flexibly to customer requests.

and we can react to any problems concerning optical appearance much more quickly. The investment was thus not only of a technical nature, but rather it also serves to ensure our reputation and our image in a fiercely competitive global market.

Until now, Suckow & Fischer has had no experience with powder coating. How does someone come up to speed in this area?

We knew that to implement this project we would need to work with the most highly qualified professionals and the very best application and systems engineers. As a result, we went searching for partners with whom we could be absolutely certain that the

project would be carried out smoothly. We looked for a general contractor that could offer us comprehensive, process-oriented solutions. We found the ideal partner with a company by the name of Noppel. In terms of applications engineering, we had already gained some initial experience in China, where we installed a Gema system several years ago. The results and service were so convincing that it was clear to us that here in Germany, too, when it came to powder coating, we again wanted to put our trust in these same suppliers.

What Suckow & Fischer didn't have, though, was a staff of specialists who could implement the powder coating

process. How did you find the right personnel?

That was, in fact, the thing that gave me the most sleepless nights because the best and most advanced systems technology doesn't do you any good if there are no well-trained specialists to run the systems. Looking for such personnel turned out to be much more difficult than I had anticipated.

Thanks to intensive work, though, we were successful in encouraging and motivating locally based highly qualified professionals to help us take our first steps into surface-treatment technology. The extensive expertise these specialists brought with them was the key to the successful implementation of our ambitious project.

The project was completed in quite a short time. What were the most critical issues in the planning process?

We launched the project in September 2010 and started searching for partners to help us implement it. The goal was to incorporate the system into our manufacturing operations in July 2011. We were, of course, well aware that this was a very challenging goal and would require significant efforts from everyone involved. Further, from the very beginning we placed special requirements of a very high level on the technology. For instance, the entire system concept had to meet the highest standards in terms of energy performance and eco-friendliness.

Thanks to the very fast and flexible response times of the system and application suppliers, we were able to award final contracts right at Christmas in 2010. We must extend our compliments to the application and systems suppliers because they honored all their commitments, and we achieved our goal of starting up in July 2011 almost exactly on that date.

ABOUT SUCKOW & FISCHER

Suckow & Fischer Systeme is a leading European developer and manufacturer of ceiling systems. Whether indoor swimming pools, impact-resistant or seamless systems, from standard to custom systems – for close to five decades Suckow & Fischer has been a supplier to an industry that constantly seeks to modernize interior finishing work with novel ideas. Technical expertise, the latest manufacturing technologies, innovative metal designs, reliable production quality and professional service have contributed to the company's sound reputation as a leading manufacturer of ceiling and partition wall systems. Based on our many years of technical expertise, we will be glad to support you in turning your ideas into reality whether made of steel, aluminum or stainless steel, and that no matter if arched, rounded or straight, whether powder coated or anodized, whether solid material, perforated or metal mesh.

2011: Construction of a state-of-the-art, fully automatic powder-coating system handling components as long as 6400 mm. In addition to our own products, we also do coating for others on a contract basis. The Contract Coating business division is under development.

Were coating tests conducted at Gema to determine the exact system configuration?

As I previously noted, we had already gained some initial experience with the installation of the Gema system in an applications setting. As regards applications engineering, we consider Gema to be #1 on the market and we knew that we could rely totally on the experience of the experts at that company. Because the very tight schedule didn't really allow for any tests, we decided to install the latest technology for fast, clean color changes. We were completely successful in doing so with the MagicCylinder fast color change system and the new OptiCenter powder management system. Color changes take little time, are cost-effective and the coating results are constantly at the highest level.

As mentioned earlier, coating quality plays a key role for products from Suckow & Fischer. At the same time, you also decided to go with a fast color change system. Is a variety of colors the hot trend in architecture?

Indeed, the desire for a wide range of colors in architecture is definitely increasing at a rapid pace. In modern buildings, every architect wants to achieve self-realization in some way. This is often done through the use of special materials or coating them with special colors or patterns. This development was the primary reason we decided to go with a fast color change system. Already today we have multiple color changes per day, and the trend is increasing. We serve our customers with a wide selection of colors that sometimes differ from each other only in fine nuances. We must meet these customer requirements, and indeed it is the strength and competitive advantage at Suckow & Fischer that we can do so all the time.

Suckow & Fischer has sized this new powder-coating system very generously, with plans to offer this capacity to outside companies, as well, under the "coating technology" label. In this regard, what is your target group?

The core expertise at Suckow & Fischer is in indoor architecture and increasingly more in the area of high-

end facade architecture. We can find the target groups for our new “Coating Technology” department in exactly these same areas, in other words among companies that must coat large components within industrial sectors such as architecture, machine construction or the automotive industry, and among companies that share our high demands on optical qualities. The quality assurance in our company is in line with the levels set by Qualicoat and GSB. In addition, our new system has been sized and designed so generously that it can be expanded at any time with a second coating line and thus is well equipped to handle strong growth in order volumes.

In your sector, do you see any development of opportunities for the use of new technologies such as thin-layer or low-temperature powder?

It is an integral part of our business that we must collaborate very intensively with many different powder manufacturers. Thus, we are also very interested in being able to use new technologies within a short period of time and bring our experience into play with these manufacturers. In this regard, the use of low-temperature powders is of course high on the wish list, and in this area we can already see great progress, which we hope to soon implement in our production.

What will the architecture of the future demand of Suckow & Fischer?

As is the case everywhere else, in this sector projects always have to be completed more quickly. Buildings are being erected in shorter times, and people expect ever faster deliveries. At the same time, contemporary buildings are becoming more complex and unique.

Our expertise, our technology and our creativity all help architects around the world to practice their art at the highest level. We are very proud of this, and we will continue to meet this demand in the future, as well, not least thanks to our new, modern powder-coating system.



CEO Rainer Fischer (left) meets regularly with his qualified staff of specialists to ensure the highest possible coating quality.

DATA ABOUT THE SUCKOW & FISCHER SYSTEM

Component dimensions:	6400 x 1800 x 800 mm
Conveyor speed:	Pretreatment 6 m/min
Coating:	Up to 1.5 m/min
System manufacturer:	Noppel
Pretreatment:	De-greasing, rinsing 1+2, etching, rinsing 1+2, passivating, demineralized water
Dryer:	gas-heated
Coating system manufacturer:	Gema Switzerland GmbH
System:	MagicCylinder fast color change system, OptiCenter powder-supply unit
Coating guns:	10 automatic, 2 manual pre-coating stations and 1 post-coating station
Axes:	2 automatic reciprocators with depth adjustment

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