



“WE’RE SHARPENING OUR PROFILE AS A COMPANY FOCUSED ON SUSTAINABILITY”

For the first time, Feintool is providing information about its commitment to sustainability and the impact of its business activities on the economy, environment, and society in a separate report. CEO Knut Zimmer explains the ways in which sustainability is established throughout the company.

When you made the decision to issue a sustainability report, you initiated on a major journey. What does sustainability mean to you?

As a technology company, we don't pursue quarterly goals, but instead focus our activities on the long term – we cultivate long-term customer relationships, our employee training programs and our high-quality products are designed to be long-lasting, and we review our investments in terms of sustainability. This means that ultimately, this isn't a new subject for us. We view sustainability as a process that we initiated long ago through our management systems. Most of our plants are certified in accordance with the ISO 14001 international environmental management standard and many also have a certified energy management system. Sustainability is something that needs to be practiced on a daily basis – and that's what we do. Now we want to go one step further, consolidate our activities, and standardize them in accordance with recognized guidelines. As a result, we're sharpening our image and intend to communicate this more strongly to our stakeholders.

To what extent will sustainability reporting have an impact on corporate management and strategy?

We're aware of the fact that we not only have a responsibility to achieve business success, but also to the environment and society. As a company that operates on a global scale, we also view this in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Our objective is for sustainability reporting to support us fine-tune our strategy and further enhance our management systems uniformly throughout the group.

Which main areas do you have your eye on in this context?

I have certain areas in mind where we will define specific objectives for our sustainability management – step by step. This, too, is a transformation process. But to do so, we first need a standardized method of collecting data. Finding valid KPIs is by no means a trivial matter, but instead one that truly makes a difference when it comes to managing sustainable development. Our resource efficiency in the supply chain we definitely want to know more about in the future. In the field of human resources, the emphasis is on recruitment and development and, of course, the health and safety of our employees. When it comes to production, our focus is on being the leader in the market for sustainable technologies and on our presence in attractive markets such as China. Here we are pursuing a successful expansion strategy.

In 2019, you were forced to operate in an uncertain market environment. Where do you see the main challenges for 2020?

In 2019, we experienced a downturn in our most important market, the automotive industry, for the first time in many years. Sales declined for economic reasons, but also because of Brexit and radical changes in mobility policy. We have responded and are positioned for 2020 in a way that gives us the ability to supply a mix of drive systems with our three technologies of fineblanking, forming, and electrolamination stamping – with increased capacities. That was our plan before the coronavirus pandemic, and that is still our plan today. The virus did, however, give rise to new uncertainties that we cannot assess at the present time. Our top priorities are to protect the health of everyone we interact with and ensure that we can continue manufacturing our products without interruption.

Has climate change contributed significantly to these market changes?

Certainly. In the context of climate change, widespread discussions about mobility and new regulatory requirements are taking place. The associated transformation affects us directly. But we are participating in this discussion. In 2019, we placed an order to conduct market research on the speed of this transformation – and as a result, believe that we are pursuing the right strategy. In a rapidly changing mobility landscape we now offer solutions for all drive systems, for e-drives as well as for combustion engines.

Do you see any other positive prospects for the future?

We believe in mobility. And the mega-trends in the automotive industry offer opportunities for us. I see considerable potential in new, efficient processes that allow us to add even more value. But I also see potential in sustainable innovations that significantly conserve resources, such as our new FB one fineblanking press. We are also currently developing components for fuel cell that will be used in hydrogen vehicles in the future.

You mentioned transformation – are your employees prepared for it?

Transformation processes are taking place at various levels. As far as changes in the mobility industry are concerned, they will take place gradually. We are heavily investing in the relevant innovations through research partnerships and employee training. We're prepared.