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Press release

Spaleck Oberflächentechnik honoured as a top innovator

Lothar Späth awards the "Top 100" seal of approval to engineering company for its outstanding innovations management

Bocholt – It's official: Spaleck Oberflächentechnik GmbH & Co. KG is one of the 100 most innovative small and medium-sized companies in Germany. So say the results of this year's "Top 100" corporate benchmarking competition - a cross-sectoral business initiative covering the entire country. One key element of the firm's success in this, the 17th year of the renowned contest, was its finely-tuned innovations management. Lothar Späth, former state premier of Baden-Württemberg, will present the prestigious "Top 100" seal of approval to Spaleck at an official ceremony in Königswinter's "Gästehaus Petersberg" this Friday evening.

As patron of the SME initiative, he will be recognising the company's achievements in the five key categories of "Innovation-friendly Senior Management", "Climate of Innovation", "Innovative Processes and Organisation", "Innovations Marketing" and "Successful Innovations".

Spaleck employs 75 people and generated sales of €11 million in 2008 developing, manufacturing and selling environmentally-friendly machinery and equipment for surface engineering. Managers at the company, based in Bocholt, north-west Germany, create a climate in which innovation can thrive. The company's marketing department also plays a very important role within the process, asking customers for detailed feedback and ensuring that this information is then evaluated at an interdepartmental level and analysed in project teams. As well as analysing satisfaction levels, the team also gauges customer opinion at inhouse marketing events, customer workshops and surveys carried out at trade fairs. "It is crucial that the innovations work in practice," explained managing director Alwin Keiten-Schmitz, so after testing its innovations inhouse, Spaleck enhances the quality and efficiency of the prototypes through intensive dialogue with customers. This not only gives the decision-makers important technical feedback, but also helps to ensure that the products are successful when they come to market. The sales team also have a special role to play, continuously monitoring markets and technologies. The sales staff all have a technical background and keep themselves abreast of relevant trends, customer requirements and new developments across the whole market.

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To qualify for the award, Spaleck had to undergo a stringent, two-stage process devised by the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration. "Our results show that the 100 top innovators generally tackle challenges head on and are thus well-equipped to deal with the current economic situation, for example. Innovation is a matter of priority at management level for most of these companies," commented Professor Nikolaus Franke, head of the research team, on the analysis. In the past three years, these award-winners generated two thirds of their revenue from innovations and innovative improvements, compared with 30 per cent in a sample of similarly-structured German SMEs. In addition, Top 100 firms were able to shave some 12 per cent off their costs through process innovations, compared with a paltry 4 per cent on the part of "average SMEs". As a result, this year's "Top 100" contains 54 German market leaders, 22 of which are global leaders in their field. Alwin Keiten-Schmitz is jubilant about the firm's success: "We are now officially classed among the most formidable innovators in the German SME sector. This award is a great boost to our credibility and will inspire our employees, partners and, of course, our customers with confidence. We could scarcely have hoped for better news in these times of crisis." Overall, 319 companies entered the "Top 100" competition this year.

All of the 100 top innovators are featured in the book "Top 100 - the 100 most innovative companies in Germany's SME sector" edited by Lothar Späth, and featured on the website www.top100.de. The project is organised by compamedia GmbH, Überlingen, Germany. Companies interested in entering the competition can apply as of now via the website. The deadline for entries is 30 October 2009.

Mentor and partners

The project's patron is Lothar Späth. Partners in the project are: Bayern Innovativ GmbH, the Fraunhofer Society for the Promotion of Applied Research, the German Centre for Productivity and Innovation (RKW), the Association for Electrical, Electronic & Information Technologies (VDE) and the Association of German Engineers (VDI). Its media partner is the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper.

Project management

The project is coordinated by Dr Nikolaus Franke, Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration. The focus of his research is on entrepreneurship, innovation management and marketing. He is one of the world's leading experts in user innovation.

Organiser: compamedia GmbH

compamedia specialises in organising benchmarking projects and creating networks for small and medium-sized enterprises. The agency concentrates on promoting its projects in the media, leaving technical implementation to its specialist partners. In addition to the *Top 100* innovation project, compamedia coordinates two other prestigious projects that highlight the achievements of Germany's SME sector: the *Top Job* employer benchmarking competition under the mentorship of Wolfgang Clement and *Ethics in Business* with Ulrich Wickert as patron.

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This text is available in digital format from masurat@compamedia.de; photographs of the awards ceremony will be available in the *Press* section of www.top100.de from Saturday, 27 June. Your contact can provide pictures of the prize-winning company.

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