RAMONA HÖNL

Bent on succeeding: How a family business wins thanks to partnership

The Heidelberg-based sheet metal processor Autz + Herrmann has been in business for 115 years, and has made a name for itself as a pioneer in laser processing. With the entry into fully automated panel bending, Managing Directors Irina Autz and Florian Friedrich are now setting the course to lead in yet another technology.

The robot arm lowers itself onto the sheet. Its grippers pick up the sheet gently using low-pressure suction cups, turn it to the required position at lightning speed, and place it in the TruBend Center 7020 panel bender from TRUMPF. The bending process is then fully automated: fast, precise, repeatable and of the highest quality.

Irina Autz and her husband, Florian Friedrich, are proud of their new system, even if it looks completely different today than originally planned. As Friedrich explained with a grin "We had already bought the TruBend Center 7020 panel bender and wanted an automation solution that was as compact and inexpensive as possible to complement it." However, in detailed discussions with the bending experts from TRUMPF and their strategic partner Starmatik, it quickly became clear that the "small" solution they had in mind could not satisfy Autz + Herrmann's requirements. Getting sound advice ultimately resulted in the best solution for Autz + Herrmann.

Always one step ahead

Passion for sheet metal is one of the keys to success with which Irina Autz and Florian Friedrich run their fourth-generation family business Autz + Herrmann in the heart of the university city of Heidelberg in Baden-Württemberg. Courage is another: constantly investing in new technologies to meet the demands of the market. "Back in the early 1980s, my father and uncle were one of the first German customers to buy a laser cutting system from TRUMPF, making a name for themselves as pioneers of this technology. We are still benefiting from this, but we are not resting on our laurels," explained Irina Autz. Today, Autz + Herrmann offers solutions along the entire sheet metal process chain and supplies customers with standard parts as well as ready-to-install and, on request, customized assemblies. Irina Autz, who is responsible for the company's finances, production and sales, always has her ear close to the market. "Our customers want service from a single source. We have adapted to this not only with our motto, 'Blech unlimited' (Sheet metal unlimited). When we come across requirements

that we can't meet with our existing technologies, machines or capacities, we look for suitable solutions."

In the heart of Heidelberg, Irina Autz and Florian Friedrich have expanded their production facility into a veritable demonstration center for innovative sheet metal processing in renovated brick buildings.

Autz + Herrmann mainly processes thin sheet metal. The low-pressure suction cups of the Starmatik robot automation system pick up blanks very gently.

The TruBend Center 7020 with Starmatik robot automation is connected to the fully automatic STOPA warehouse. Employees are only required for the provision of empty pallets and the removal of loaded pallets.

The Starmatik robot automation system for loading and unloading the TruBend Center 7020 speeds up production.

Sound advice leads to a change of direction

This was also the case with panel bending. "We had been interested in this technology for some time to fill a gap in our portfolio," said Irina Autz. When the right request came from a customer who buys around 10,000 parts per year, the matter was ripe for discussion. The entrepreneurial couple quickly decided to purchase the TruBend Center 7020 from TRUMPF. "One of the deciding factors for us was the exceptional box height of 350 millimeters, which allows us to bend housings, for example, in a single pass," explained Florian Friedrich. When it came to automation, the decision was only made after thorough consultation with Stefan Richter, bending expert and project manager at TRUMPF, and Roberto DeNardi from Starmatik. TRUMPF and automation specialist Starmatik have been strategic partners since 2021. The focus of the collaboration is on the robotic automation of bending machines. "Autz + Herrmann has benefited from this partnership," said Stefan Richter. "When Mr. Friedrich told me that he planned to run the system unattended overnight or over the weekend, it was clear to me that a small automation solution would not be sufficient in the long term." Richter's arguments and the concept he presented fell on fertile ground. Irina Autz and Florian Friedrich decided to invest in a Starmatik robot automation system to load and unload the bending machine and to connect the entire system to the existing STOPA warehouse with 550 storage locations. With this system, the finished parts are unloaded without interrupting the bending process.

Picking up speed with automation

With the TruBend Center 7020, Autz + Herrmann can now also form complex components made of thin sheet metal precisely and automatically. "This was often time-consuming and difficult with air bending," explained Irina Autz. The sensor-based ACB laser angle measuring system ensures perfect and reproducible bending results, allowing the angles to be checked during the bending process and even narrow tolerances to be bent with high precision. Autz + Herrmann uses the TecZone

Bend programming software in combination with the SimulEasy simulation software to program the bending machine, including robot automation. "SimulEasy can be used to create 3D simulations including collision monitoring. This gives our programmers certainty," explained Friedrich. No manual intervention is required during the machining process. Tool setup using the ToolMaster Bend tool changer integrated in the TruBend Center 7020 no longer requires an operator when changing the standard tools and the material replenishment comes automatically from the STOPA warehouse. A robot, which travels on a 16-metre-long floor conveyor installed in front of the TruBend Center 7020, inserts the blanks quickly and precisely into the TruBend Center 7020 and stacks the removed finished parts on the designated pallets. "During series production, our employees only have to remove the loaded pallets and provide empty ones," explained Friedrich.

The TecZone Bend programming software in combination with SimulEasy ensures process reliability. This allows 3D simulations including collision monitoring to be generated before the bending process.

In recent years, Irina Autz and Florian Friedrich have invested heavily in an automated bending center.

TRUMPF and automation specialist Starmatik have been strategic partners since 2021. (From left) Stefan Richter, bending expert and project manager at TRUMPF, Dominic Schuster, sales representative at TRUMPF and Roberto DeNardi from Starmatik have found the best solution for Autz + Herrmann.

Teamwork pays off

Although Autz + Herrmann was the first customer for whom TRUMPF and Starmatik installed the complete solution consisting of TruBend Center 7020 and Starmatik robot automation. Everything went smoothly from the initial consultation to the start-up. "We particularly liked the fact that the two partners acted as a team at all times. We got everything from a single source, so to speak," said Florian Friedrich with satisfaction.

Although the investment for the TruBend Center 7020 with Starmatik automation turned out to be somewhat higher than originally planned, the entrepreneurial couple have no regrets about their purchase decision. "The overall system comprising the machine, automatic loading and unloading and warehouse connection is a great solution that leaves all our options open. It sets us on course for technological leadership in forming," said Friedrich. And Irina Autz added, "The teamwork worked well again. Together, we initiate an investment idea, examine it from all sides and listen to the experts' arguments. It's an interactive process. You can think of it like a pendulum that comes to a standstill at some point. Then our decision is made." Florian Friedrich added with a smile: "And then we go full throttle, it can't go fast enough for us."

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