CATHARINA DAUM

Of networked systems and robots

The company Omas S.p.a. from Italy has become a real lighthouse in terms of digitization. Currently, a self-propelled forklift truck is at the top of the wish list.

Omas S.p.a. is a company that makes a lasting impression. Not just due to the scale and sophistication of its manufacturing facilities, but also thanks to its remarkably innovative approach to doing business. Marco Grilli's father and three other founding members established the company in 1966, initially to produce parts for accordions. But as the music industry became increasingly electronic in the early 1980s, instrument makers turned their backs on steel parts and began switching to plastic ones, putting Omas S.p.a. in something of a quandary. In 1985, after two years working in sales at a multinational glass company, Marco struck a deal with his father to try working at Omas S.p.a. for six months to see how he liked it. Fast forward 33 years, and he is still there – but now firmly established at the helm of the company. And if he were asked what led him to where he is now, he would most likely say: changes.

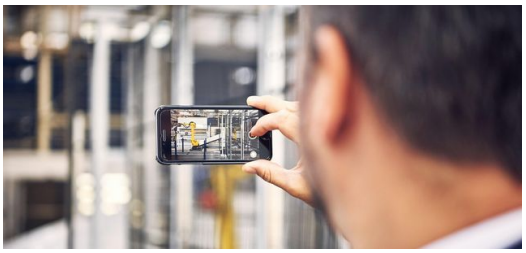
Marco Grilli was determined that the company should branch out into other industries instead of just focusing on musical instruments. He also began investing in new technologies and acquired the company's first punching machine. That was a bold move for a business that, at the time, had a turnover of just 500,000 euros a year. But Grilli's willingness to embrace change ultimately paid off. Gradually their customer base expanded to include not just local customers, but also international companies including the Fiat Group. Initially Omas S.p.a. was producing small, simple parts – and it would take another big change for the company to evolve. By investing in new systems and staff training, the company soon had the capacity to produce larger, more complex parts. From their customers' perspective, that move transformed them into a supplier that could now be called upon to help jointly develop new products. Marco Grilli knows exactly what he wants and what his team is capable of. Today, Omas S.p.a. produces not only individual parts but also entire assemblies from sheets and tubes, all in accordance with the most rigorous standards and with a clear focus on service and quality.

Robot colleagues

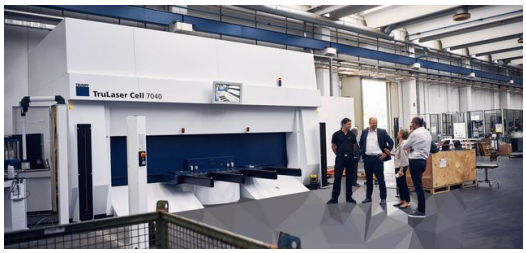
Omas S.p.a. has always invested an average of ten percent of its turnover in new technologies. Three years ago, the company took the plunge into Industry 4.0. Today, all its key systems are connected to each other, and the company has already made far more progress in the realm of digitalization than most of its competitors, as well as blazing a pioneering trail in robotics. Automated production robots have become a commonplace sight at Omas S.p.a. They are part of the team, just like the 120 employees. The company already has 40 robots, one for every three employees – yet the industry average is just one for every 135 people. But Grilli's staff don't need to worry, because their metal colleagues are not about to take away their jobs. Instead, they support their human colleagues in their day-to-day work.

Marco Grilli, Managing Director of Omas S.p.a., Thomas Schneider, Managing Director Development, Trumpf Werkzeugmaschinen GmbH & Co. KG and the Managing Director of TRUMPF Italy, Marcella Montelatici, on a tour of the production halls. Together, they form a trio that has one thing in common: Curiosity for new technologies and enthusiasm for innovations. – Frederik Dulay-Winkler

Robot colleague: For the employees at Omas S.p.a., robots have long been part of everyday life. – Frederik Dulay-Winkler



Photogenic machines: Thomas Schneider was particularly enthusiastic about the robots. – Frederik Dulay-Winkler



The TruLaser Cell 7040 in the production hall of Omas S.p.a. – Frederik Dulay-Winkler

Even so, the addition of robots to the shop floor was certainly another big change for the company. Grilli ensured his employees were heavily involved in the process right from the start. That eased some of their misgivings, because not everyone is as open to change as the company's managing director. Grilli himself needs variety, and he admits that things like going to the same restaurant every Friday or heading to the same football stadium every Sunday would quite simply bore him.

Finding new solutions together

Grilli is equally committed to pursuing change in the future. The 60-year-old managing director aims to take digitalization even further in his business. Logistics is where he sees some of the biggest potential, and acquiring a driverless forklift is already high on his agenda. Marcella Montelatici and Thomas Schneider from TRUMPF have been listening carefully – and they are already working with Grilli on a solution.

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