CATHARINA DAUM

Coronavirus epidemic: TRUMPF digitalizes Smart Factory Consulting

For almost four years, TRUMPF smart factory consultants have been visiting customer sites worldwide – recently the coronavirus pandemic has prevented them from doing so. Now, TRUMPF Smart Factory consultants have digitalized their sessions. Christina Sandu leads the team and explains the challenges.

Since March 22, 2020 social distancing orders have been in place in Germany. Just one week later, your team began conducting customer consultations online, why didn't you just postpone the assignments?

Sandu: Because we are confident in the potential of digitalization. Since customer businesses are quieter due to the Coronavirus, many entrepreneurs are using this time to optimize their production processes. They are also devoting themselves to topics which they would not usually have time for during daily business hours so postponing was out of the question for us and digitizing our consulting services was the logical step.

Were you able to digitalize an offer overnight?

Sandu: It was faster than we initially thought. We have always based our services on the here and now so we are used to quickly adapting to customer needs. When social distancing became necessary, we asked ourselves what could be done online - and we came up with a lot.

Which steps can be mapped even without visiting the site?

Sandu: Our services range from process optimization and factory planning to strategy consulting. Take process optimization, for example – first we collect the customer's information, analyze and evaluate it. This can then be depicted almost completely digitally. Developing recommendations for action in the conception phase afterwards can also be performed online.

> **It is because of Corona, that many companies want to optimize production**
>
> Christina Sandu, Teamleader Smart Factory Consulting at TRUMPF

What information does your team collect and how do the consultants manage to get an overview of production from their home desk?

Sandu: For each customer, we define specific individual checklists in advance for the information we will need. In addition, the customers send us documents such as hall plans, shift plans or construction drawings of their parts. To get an impression of the production process, the customer can take us on a video tour of their production facilities or send us a video. Today's possibilities are very diverse.

What tools do you use for digital sessions with customers?

Sandu: We use GoTo Meeting, Skype or we can also use Microsoft Teams. We record all sessions in Trello Boards that way everyone involved can see what has already been discussed and where we stand.

Sounds very simple. Are there any challenges?

Sandu: Sure, there are. When we are on site, we are less likely to miss "hidden" challenges within production. For example, on-site a consultant meets a machine operator in production who then explains why there is a bottleneck at that machine today. These problems can be more difficult to identify virtually but we will make up for them on site as soon as it is possible.

What else did you have to do differently?

Sandu: An online consultation with virtual brainstorming sessions and workshops demands a lot of concentration from the participants. Maintaining concentration in front of the computer for hours can be more strenuous than a day on site. That's why we put together shorter work packages. We work through them one after another. The preparation for a digital consultation is also more complex than a consultation on site. We have to think very carefully about what information we need from the customer in advance so that we can keep the number of inquiries as low as possible.

What is the feedback from customers so far?

Sandu: Very good! Of course, some customers were initially skeptical as to whether remote consulting could replace our on-site consulting. But so far, the feedback has been consistently positive!

And after the social distancing restrictions have been lifted can we continue back on-site at the customer?

Sandu: I think that with the social distancing restrictions two points became clear very quickly. First, how much is actually possible while working remotely. And that not everything can be accomplished in a digital setting. In the future we will offer both options and decide with the customer which topics and areas we will cover digitally and which we will cover on site as just a video cannot completely replace an onsite visit.

Christina Sandu heads the TRUMPF Smart Factory consulting team at TRUMPF. Before changing companies, the process expert was worked with transferring supply chains for BOSCH power tools from the analog to the digital world.

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