

ALTIX INDUSTRY CHAMPIONS INTERVIEW

One on One: Discussion with a Global Industry Champion: Isabellenhütte

Each quarter we sit down with industry executives and thought leaders to discuss the trends, challenges, and best practices that are transforming their businesses.

Today, we are with Uwe Keller, Managing Director, Executive Vice President Sales of Isabellenhütte USA, to discuss how Uwe and his team are successfully developing the North American business for a German Industry Champion.



Uwe, can you please introduce us to Isabellenhütte?

Isabellenhütte is an eight generations, family-owned, German company from the Hesse / Dillenburg region in Germany. From its humble beginnings 500 years ago as a simple copper smelter serving their customer base, the company has never ceased to innovate and to reinvent itself. Today Isabellenhütte is one of the world's leading manufacturer of thermo and resistance alloys, precision power resistors and precision measurement technologies, serving the automotive, aerospace, medical and a wide range of other industries with some of the most groundbreaking applications.

What problems do you solve for your customers and what is Isabellenhütte's value proposition?

In the automotive industry for example, which is our largest market, our current measurement sensors are a vital component in battery management systems for Electric Vehicles, measuring the state of health and charge of the batteries, sending precise information to the driver when to re-charge. Similarly, our power resistors deliver precise current measurements in the power braking and power steering systems and many other mission critical applications in vehicles.

In aerospace, our space qualified resistors are found in the power management systems and our alloys are used to measure the exhaust temperature in aircraft turbine engines in order to detect potential problems early on.

This past year we experienced a surge in the need for medical devices and a shift from our traditional products in heart catheters, where our alloys help monitor the process temperature during procedures to new applications where we supply alloy wires for the heating elements ventilators.

Regardless of the industry, we are intensely focused on solving our customers' challenges. Even though we are not the largest company, we ask our customers to expect more from us than they expect from our competitors. We work closely with our customers giving them both engineering and business support. For example, today we are proactive in limiting the risks of an increasingly fragile global supply chain. We do that with longer term price stability, by securing material rates in order to deliver on our promise. We also help with customized inventory management solutions to best match service and delivery to our customers' needs.

Uwe, you have joined the company three years ago. Can you please tell us about Isabellenhütte in North America and what have been big milestones?

Isabellenhütte started in North America in the 1980's with ISOTEK Corporation as its distributor. In 2010, Isabellenhütte acquired ISOTEK resulting in the launch of its first international subsidiary. While Isabellenhütte was successful in Europe with distribution partners and direct customers, the international expansion is actually quite recent for a company with such a long history and we want to further accelerate our global growth, the US and China being at the core of our international strategy.

Since 2010, the company has experienced continuous growth in the US and in the past three years, we nearly doubled the business. In addition to serving our existing customers, we invested in developing our brand awareness in the US which enabled us to win more customers and more market share in a variety of industries and applications. In addition to our new marketing strategy, a strong contributor to this boost have been the megatrends in electrification and e-mobility and the resulting technology changes in the automotive and industrial environment.

Uwe, can you please tell us about your vision for the next few years and which challenges and opportunities you want to attack?

Currently, our biggest challenge is to keep up with customer demand. Throughout the crisis, we maintained an aggressive production strategy because we knew the market would recover fast, especially in the automotive industry. We worked very hard and we focused on being prepared and flexible for the rebound we are now experiencing, so our customers can continue to rely on us.

Next, we are looking forward to playing an important role with another major topic - sustainability. We are committed to supporting our customers across industries in their efforts from clean energy, smart grids, to electric vehicles and the respective charging infrastructure. We are also active in investing in the development of future technologies and alloys, supporting the next Innovation breakthroughs. Isabellenhütte invests heavily in R&D, for example working on MIM (Metal Injection Molding) technologies, manufacturing resistors in all shapes from an alloy paste, or new technologies for passive electronic components where we seek to reach new groundbreaking innovation, packing more power in smaller footprints.

The way we remain innovative is by continuously reinventing ourselves. We speak and listen to our customers and we have an effective in-house collaboration and process between Sales and R&D to channel the customer's ideas into the R&D team.

The customer experience is the central part of our strategy. We are very serious about knowing our customers. We meet face-to-face and we ask for feedback. Recently we also started to do targeted online customer surveys on a regular basis. We continuously ask ourselves: if our doing is important and beneficial to the customer? How does it solve a problem for the customer? We want to ensure that the improvements we are making are felt !

As part of an international company with strong traditions (500 yearlong legacy) how do you collaborate with your HQ in Germany?

The headquarter sees Isabellenhütte USA as a company within the company. Our HQ is committed to support the success in the US. There is a tremendous amount of trust and we have the level of independence we need to develop the US market successfully with the local needs and differences while of course following the global strategy of the company.

The company recently went through a generational change in the Top Management. The company is led by 3 Managing Directors. Two of them joined the company within the last 12 months. We communicate frequently and transparently both at the management level and also with all the employees. We understand and we apply the saying: “no involvement – no commitment.” A trust-based management culture is what I would say defines us the most.

As a leader, you are challenged in many ways. How do you personally find your balance and keep your high energy level and stay positive?

I try to keep a good work-life balance. Sometimes it is more, sometimes it is less balanced. We try to work smart, focusing on the biggest problem first, the one that makes the biggest impact. Time management can be challenging especially when you are driving change. I spend time with my family and enjoy walking my dogs. I read from a variety of media publications, keeping an open ear and an open mind to learn new things and I also rely on partners like Altix who have a lot of experience in different aspects of the business and who can help us with topics we can't resolve or where we don't have the time to focus on. It is always important to keep the mind fresh and open to new ideas.

Thank you very much Uwe for sharing with us and our readers your story and the story of Isabellenhütte. We wish you and your team continued success.

ABOUT ISABELLENHÜTTE:

Isabellenhütte is one of the world's leading manufacturers of precision measurement technologies , thermo and resistance alloys as well as precision power resistors, serving industries ranging from aerospace and medical to energy and automotive with unparalleled customer support.

<https://www.isabellenhuetteusa.com/>

ABOUT ALTIX:

Altix is the middle-market international industrial champions' management consulting partner, providing business strategy, technology and innovation, and operational excellence support, in the world of advanced manufacturing and international supply chain. www.altixconsulting.com