

## From Warendorf out into the world

Interview with Dr. Benedikt Meier, Managing Director of Helmes Apparatebau GmbH & Co. KG and HL Anlagentechnik GmbH



(Dr. Benedikt Meier, Managing Director of Helmes Apparatebau GmbH & Co. KG)

For over 100 years, high-quality equipment, tanks, vessels, pipe systems and complete systems have been manufactured in Freckenhorst, in most cases customized to customer requirements. During this time, Helmes Apparatebau GmbH & Co. KG and its sister company HL Anlagentechnik GmbH have evolved with the demands of the market and were reorganized two years ago. After a century of family ownership, Helmes is now part of the Mittelständische Beteiligungsgesellschaft – and is more dynamic than ever.

**Wirtschaftsforum:** Dr. Meier, a lot has happened since our last interview around 15 month ago. Covid-19, the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis and inflation have left their mark. Where does Helmes stand today?

**Dr. Benedikt Meier:** We set ourselves very ambitious goals back then and are proud to have largely achieved them. Covid-19 and the war made economic circumstances much more complicated, but we were still able to increase turnover and productivity. We have satisfied customers and employees, a great team with whom we can position ourselves sustainably for the future.

**Wirtschaftsforum:** Has anything changed in the structure of the company as a result of the crises in recent years?

**Dr. Benedikt Meier:** We are still based in Freckenhorst, have 35 employees and a turnover of 7.5 million euros. Overall, we have consolidated what we do and expanded our customer base in terms of scope and geography. Various projects have been successfully completed.



(Helmes is synonymous with high-quality tank and vessel construction)

**Wirtschaftsforum:** To what extent has the customer base been expanded?

**Dr. Benedikt Meier:** Our main focus has traditionally been on the food industry, the chemical industry and the pharmaceutical sector. In the meantime, we have also gained a foothold in the automotive industry and completed projects for Porsche and Audi. Because it has become clear that our expertise is urgently needed in these areas, we will be focusing more strongly on this sector in future, without neglecting our core markets.

**Wirtschaftsforum:** What kind of impulses are you giving the company on this path of further development?

**Dr. Benedikt Meier:** My role as Managing Director is multifaceted. I deal with operational matters where necessary, but even more so with strategic tasks. One key impulse is to better utilize our operational possibilities, for example by making employees team leaders. This allows projects to be handled more efficiently, and customers can rely on us to honor our word. It is very important to me to integrate every single employee; everyone is an integral part of our success.



(All weld seams on the stainless steel tanks are X-rayed to guarantee uncompromising quality)



(Employees who enjoy their work and stand behind the company are the key to success for Helmes)

**Wirtschaftsforum:** Let's come back to the portfolio. Are there currently any special projects that reflect Helmes' core expertise?

**Dr. Benedikt Meier:** We have just completed two 65,000-liter tanks, made entirely of stainless steel, with a wall thickness of up to 18 mm, each weighing 13 tons. All critical weld seams were x-rayed to ensure first-class quality. A second project is particularly important for our region; we are producing six tanks for a customer from Westbevern, all of which have been completed to the day, just as the customer can expect from Helmes. The containers will go from the region out into the rest of the

world; this is precisely our strategic objective for the future. There are also many smaller projects; containers from €3,000 or €4,000 up to €200,000. It is a wide range. Helmes is characterized by the fact that we don't do serial production, but rather order-specific production. In plant engineering, we were able to realize a major project for Porsche Leipzig and another for Audi in Neckarsulm. Both Porsche and Audi were very satisfied with our performance and we expect to continue receiving orders from these car manufacturers in the future.

**Wirtschaftsforum:** How does the company manage to acquire new customers and orders?

**Dr. Benedikt Meier:** For us, personal contact with customers is the be-all and end-all. I myself spend one or two days a week travelling to customers. Of course, we also work with social media and various other marketing tools to raise our profile, but they can't replace face-to-face dialogue.

**Wirtschaftsforum:** Apart from this personal customer relationship, are there other keys to success?

**Dr. Benedikt Meier:** For us, success is above all the success of our team. Our employees are passionate about what they do and enjoy their work. You can feel their desire to do a good job; this is reflected in the products we deliver to our customers, who in turn are satisfied and recommend us to others. This word-of-mouth recommendation helps tremendously. What's more, we have a good mix of experienced and young employees who are constantly providing new impulses in terms of products and processes. That's how we get a little better every day.



(From Warendorf, the containers, systems and equipment are shipped all over the world)



(Containers are supplied primarily to the food, pharmaceutical, and chemical industries)

**Wirtschaftsforum:** What steps is Helmes Apparatebau taking to achieve its sustainability goals?

**Dr. Benedikt Meier:** We place great value on sustainability. We also work with used containers and rely on refurbishing instead of new construction and disposal of the old product. This method is more environmentally friendly and saves massive amounts of raw materials. In addition, we have been operating a high-performance photovoltaic system since June in order to produce in an environmentally friendly way.

**Wirtschaftsforum:** Is there a concrete vision for the future for Helmes?

**Dr. Benedikt Meier:** We want to break the 10-million-euro mark by the end of 2026 – and we are confident that we can achieve this with our team.