

Laying the foundations

With his appointment as president of the EMEA region, Oliver Mihm sees Plexus as being in an excellent position for future growth, as he told **Neil Tyler**.

Serving more than 140 companies across markets ranging from aerospace and defence to network communications and life sciences, Plexus provides engineering, manufacturing and aftermarket services to a wide range of companies.

“We are a one-stop shop, offering a range of services,” explains Oliver Mihm, EMEA president. “Our focus is on customers in the mid-to-low volume, higher complexity market sectors, which gives us a better understanding of their needs and of the markets in which they operate.”

Plexus has, since 2011, made a number of significant investments in its European operations. According to Mihm, this means Plexus is ‘well placed to see strong growth in coming years’.

Mihm, who was appointed in 2015, is responsible for the company’s European business. Based in Plexus’ Darmstadt Design Centre, Mihm joined the company in 2000 as a design engineer and has progressed steadily via a number of management roles.

“Before my current position, I had oversight of the industrial/commercial market sector as vice president.”

It is that experience which is expected to prove crucial as he looks to expand the company’s presence in key European markets.

“A crucial part of my job is to raise awareness of the company in Europe,” Mihm explains. “We have a strong presence in the UK, but our brand recognition in continental Europe needs improving.”

“We’re looking to raise this through a combination of better marketing and making more use of social media. We’ll also be attending electronica for the first time.”

Plexus established its German subsidiary in 2011, expanded its UK facilities in 2012 and opened a manufacturing site in Romania in 2013.

“We have continued to invest in those facilities and have laid the foundations for becoming a major player in Europe,” Mihm suggests.

“My brief when appointed was to leverage our global network and expertise with European customers, increase brand awareness and build on the momentum achieved over the past five years.”

Plexus has invested a significant amount in the region, with new facilities and capital equipment.

“As part of our continued programme of growth within EMEA,

we recently invested \$500k in a dedicated building and equipment for Environmental Stress Screening (ESS) at our facility in Kelso. It provides an in-house service for customers in the defence, security and aerospace sectors, which are expanding rapidly, as well as for those in the oil and gas industry.” Mihm says this forms part of the company’s aim to ‘deliver a full service to our customers’.

“The ESS facility, opened in September, is an example of how we aim to develop a closer relationship with our customers; the kind of relationship more typically seen among customers and smaller EMS players. That extends from research, right the way through to the aftermarket and that value proposition is playing out strongly in Europe,” he believes.

‘Behind the curve’

Europe, however, is ‘behind the curve’ when it comes to trends in the EMS market, according to Mihm. “In the US, companies are further ahead when it comes to using EMS providers and better understand their role. As trade barriers have fallen, so more companies are looking to compete globally. As a consequence, competition is becoming more intense.

“That’s why they engage with companies like Plexus. They want to focus on what they are best at – their core competencies – and outsource the rest as they look to drive down the costs of production.

“As a result, in the US, companies are more comfortable when it comes to working with EMS companies across the broader value stream. Regional players in Europe tend to be more focused on production, but that is certainly changing and I want us to be in a position to benefit from that.

“The UK market is more aligned with the US, but I think that has happened because sectors like aerospace, defence, health and the life sciences are driving the market. UK companies are more open to allowing an EMS partner to take on the pieces of the value chain that are not part of their core competencies.”

Addressing the needs of these sectors is a challenge, Mihm concedes, because those sectors are experiencing rapid change. “They are evolving rapidly. What we are seeing is a strong tendency to leverage technologies from outside a particular sector – a case in point is diagnostic equipment. A sector that was traditionally laboratory based is now trending towards the personal. We are seeing a revolution in electronics driven by the development of strong computer platforms and increased processing power.”

Mihm believes that if outsourcing is to work, companies need to develop a closer relationship with the OEM. “As firms mature, they tend to engage with outsourcing and more aspects of the value chain. Devices are becoming more complex and time to market is getting shorter.

“All of which requires earlier and deeper interaction when it comes to the design, test, engineering and manufacturing of products. All of this provides us with better insight into the requirements of OEMs.”

That relationship has played to Plexus’ strengths Mihm believes and helped its establish a strong range of capabilities. “We can truly call ourselves a ‘one stop’ partner for OEMs,” he concludes.



Oliver Mihm

Oliver Mihm is regional president, EMEA for Plexus. Having joined the company in 2000 as a design engineer, he progressed through a number of leadership roles. He recently served as senior vice president of global engineering solutions and expanded his responsibilities in 2014 to include oversight of the industrial/commercial sector. He assumed his current role in 2015, with responsibility for providing strategic leadership within the EMEA region.