

American subsidiary of Lindauer DORNIER turns 40 Four decades of first class service to the textile and plastics industry

More than 240 customers, almost 8,500 weaving machines delivered, one globalization-induced structural transformation and a worldwide economic crisis with epicenter in the USA – in its 40 years of existence, the American DORNIER Machinery Corporation (AmDO) has certainly seen both: high points and lows. And like so many American business success stories, it all started in a small street being a name that could not have been more symbolic.

“In 1978 when we moved into the 900 square meter premises on Performance Road in Charlotte, North Carolina, there were nine of us”, recalls Hans Geiger. As President of the company, it was he who directed the fortunes of the US branch of Lindauer DORNIER GmbH for 23 years. Of course, weaving machines from the shores of Lake Constance were already operating in the USA. “Local weavers, including textile magnates like the legendary Roger Milliken have produced clothing, furnishing fabrics and technical textiles on our machines.” But they only rose to the ranks of prime supplier for the North and South American territory with the foundation of American DORNIER. Since then, AmDO employees commission the machines made in Lindau, Germany, convert and optimize them all over the continent. And customers from Canada to Argentina receive their spare parts from Charlotte – in emergencies within 24 hours.

In the 1980s, production of film for food packaging, video cassettes and photographic film started to boom, DORNIER shipping dozens of film stretching lines across the Atlantic. Ever since then, AmDO ensured regular servicing of the up to 2,600 roller bearing clips on these film stretching lines, which transport the film through these gigantic machines, which can be up to 150 meters (492 feet) long.

Restructuring and world economic crisis

Business in America is flourishing: In 1984 and again in 1998, AmDO is modernized and expanded – mechanical and electronic workshops are set up, training rooms for customers and a proving room for weaving tests as well. But as the 90s come to a close, the US textile industry is caught up in the tide of globalization. The production of clothing and household fabrics migrates wholesale to Asia. Existing textile manufacturers, including many weavers, and among them DORNIER customers, find themselves in a fight for survival. “In the traditional textile producing states in the US, almost everyone knew someone who had lost their job in the textile industry”, says Peter Brust, who took over the helm at American DORNIER in 2001. It was a challenging start, the AmDO executive vice president recalls: besides the economic consequences of globalization, at that time everyone also has to come to terms with the September 11 attacks.

In the wake of the weakened state of the US textile industry, difficult years follow for the respected machinebuilder's subsidiary. To make up for declining sales, in 2004 AmDO with its focus on service and distribution takes on the responsibility of supporting the entire American continent. Hope is also sustained in the form of technical fabrics made from carbon, glass, aramide and glass. Due to their outstanding technological quality, demand for the weaving machines from DORNIER increases. In 2008, the textile industry feels the full force of the global economic crisis. “New investments fell to almost zero”, says Brust, who was working ceaselessly to keep AmDO employees in work and wages. “Many companies were forced to let people go, many European textile machinebuilders had to lay off their workers in America.” DORNIER keeps its staff. “Job security was our number one priority”, says Brust. Otherwise, they would not have been able to guarantee fast response times, first-class service and uninterrupted availability. It is a principle of the family company, established by its founder Peter Dornier: The employees are the key to technology leadership and commercial success.

Major reconstruction for stable recruitment

But before you can keep jobs safe, you have to fill the positions. “The shortage of new hires is a significant problem at the moment; we simply can't find the people”, says AmDO executive vice president Brust. At the same time, he continues, Charlotte is a boom town, albeit mainly for banks, insurers and service companies. There is practically no interest in working in a sector that has been labeled a “dead industry whose time is past”, and “lacking innovation”. This is not accurate: Demand has seen a resurgence in the US since 2014. “A result of monetary and economic policy and low energy costs”, says Brust. He estimates that nowadays about 80 percent of DORNIER weaving machines are in service producing technical fabrics such as airbags, high-tech sun protection fabrics, carbon and glass fabrics, filters and tire cord. High quality upholstery fabrics with value added properties are also made on DORNIER weaving machines. The venerable technology of weaving arrived in the future long ago.

The only question is: How can you convince employees of the new generation that this is so? “Dual training programs are not comprehensive here as they are in Germany”, says Brust, who wants to introduce just such an “apprenticeship” with a local community college himself as a matter of urgency, to attract and train young technicians. The mother company in Lindau is also supporting efforts to create an environment for technical training at the Charlotte site. AmDO's managing director is confident: “Our customers include many innovation drivers in their own business sectors which have created highly profitable markets for themselves; I have no concerns about the future.”

Background information about Lindauer DORNIER GmbH:

Lindauer DORNIER GmbH and its Weaving Machine, Specialty Machinery and Composite Systems® divisions has earned its place as a global technology leader. In 2017, the family-owned German company with about 1,000 employees (including 63 trainees) recorded incoming orders totaling about 280 million euro. The DORNIER system family, consisting of rapier and air-jet weaving machines, is the contemporary answer to the unforgiving catalog of specifications demanded by today's market. DORNIER is a market leader in engineering and production of film stretching lines for manufacturing ultra-thin plastic films. Besides the packaging industry, particularly including the food and pharmaceutical product sectors, the films are also used in high-tech products such as semiconductors, capacitors for hybrid vehicles and as film displays in smartphones, flatscreens and tablets. The machines and systems are manufactured in the production workshops at Lindau and Esseratsweiler in Germany. 90% of the machines produced are exported.



AmDO Executive vice president Peter Brust, with Maja Dornier, Hans Geiger, former President of AmDO and Peter D. Dornier, Chairman of the Lindauer DORNIER GmbH Board of Management (from l. to r.)
(Photo: "Gruppenbild"; Source: DORNIER)



Firmly positioned in profitable markets: DORNIER customers are often innovation drivers (Photo: "Webhalle"; Source: DORNIER)



1978: AmDO was started by nine employees in 900 square meters of offices (Photo: "1978"; Source: DORNIER)



Today: Over 240 customers, almost 8,500 weaving machines shipped to date – DORNIER is a reliable partner for the American textile industry (Photo: "Heute"; Source: DORNIER)