Valentin Bühler: "Agility, quality awareness, and customer orientation"

Sulzer Metco offers a variety of solutions that meet almost all industrial requirements for surface treatment. The Head of the business unit Services of Sulzer Metco, Valentin Bühler, spoke to us about the benefits of coatings and surface treatments.

Metco has left the Sulzer Group and is now part of the Oerlikon Group.

oerlikon metco

The new business unit Services of Sulzer Metco was established in 2010. Which Sulzer Metco companies were merged organizationally?

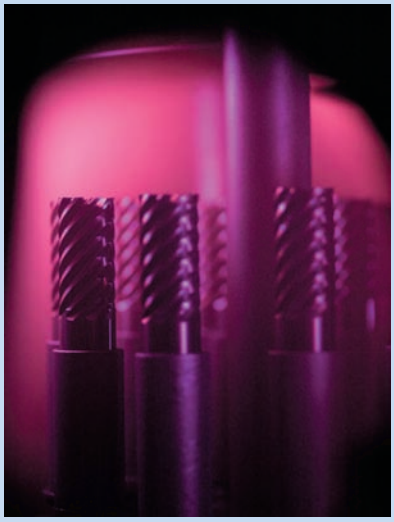
The business unit Services of Sulzer Metco was created by merging the organizational service provider units Thermal Spray Coating Services and Thin Film. The Thin Film organization offers PVD (physical vapor deposition), heat treatment and nitriding services, as well as PVD system development and sales. Operating under the company name of Sulzer Metaplas GmbH, we have a well-reputed, leading coating company in Germany.

What was the reason for this change?

As part of the new orientation of the division Sulzer Metco, we wanted to combine all service organizations under one umbrella. Although they offer very different treatment services or technologies, these organizations are characterized by very similar processes, structures, and mentalities.

How do customers benefit?

These service organizations are characterized by in-depth knowledge of customer requirements, extreme flexibility (7/24), agility, quality awareness, customer orientation, as well as cost awareness. Thanks to their generally compact size, customer requirements can be fulfilled promptly by these units. Customers in both the thermal-spray coating and thin-film segments benefit from the synergy of established methods and procedures.



Batch during plasma nitriding in Bergisch Gladbach (D).

How many customer service centers do you have and what range of services do they offer?

We have a total of ten locations—six of which are in Germany, one in Switzerland, one in the United Kingdom, one in Canada, and one in the United States. Our range of services includes PVD service and PVD system development in Bergisch Gladbach (D), plasma nitriding and heat treatment in Salzgitter (D), plasma nitriding in Niederwürschnitz (D), and PVD service and plasma nitriding in Altbach (D). Our service centers for thermal-spray coating are located in Wohlen (CH), Salzgitter (D), Weissenborn (D), Stalybridge (UK), Edmonton (CDN), and Barboursville (West Virginia, USA).

Most of the Sulzer industry segments are served by each of these centers. Their primary focus, however, remains on general industry and automobile as well as oil and gas.

Charging a batch for plasma nitriding in Niederwürschnitz (D).

Which surface treatments are applied most frequently? What are their properties?

In the high-volume automobile industry sector, our plasma heat treatment processes, which offer corrosion resistance in addition to wear protection, are most prevalent. Thermal-spray coating specializes in larger and very large components, such as piston rods, rollers, and pump components and offers a broad range of applications from wear protection to corrosion protection as well as high-temperature applications and medical devices. Our PVD technology offers state-of-the-art coatings for machining, forming, plastics technology, and components—with the option of substituting expensive materials in combination with plasma heat treatment to achieve significant improvement in service life.

A final question: How can surface coatings contribute toward solving the major challenges of the future?

Coatings are beneficial in supporting the efficient use of our limited resources, while at the same time protecting the environment. They extend the service life of tools and components and facilitate the reuse of components by simply applying a new coating. Coatings improve and optimize the efficiency of existing designs—efficient engines would not be possible without coating—and are integral to the development of innovative solutions and products, for instance, in solar technology or as substitutes for hazardous substances, such as hexavalent chromium. In addition to direct savings in the use of fossil fuels, the effects of coatings are particularly evident in the CO_2 emission reduction achieved in the lifetime cycle.

Interview: Gabriel Barroso

Valentin Bühler
heads the business unit Services of Sulzer Metco, which consists of the Thin Film (PVD / nitriding) and Thermal Coating units. In his previous roles as Manager and Vice President of Balzers Ltd., he was responsible for the company's business expansion in Asia, Latin America, and eastern Europe. He holds masters degrees in electrical engineering from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) and in business administration from the University of St. Gallen.

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