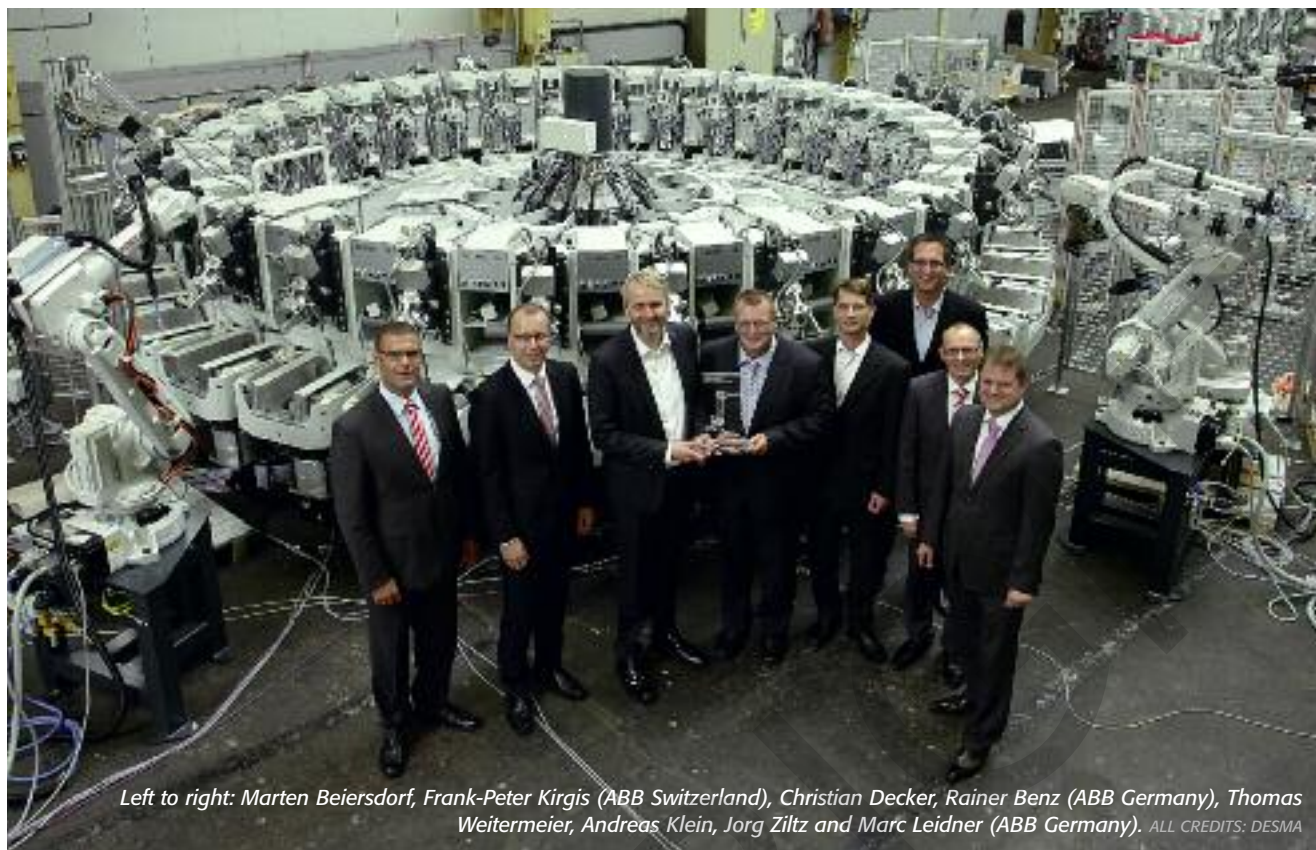




Left to right: Marten Beiersdorf, Frank-Peter Kirgis (ABB Switzerland), Christian Decker, Rainer Benz (ABB Germany), Thomas Weitermeier, Andreas Klein, Jorg Ziltz and Marc Leidner (ABB Germany). ALL CREDITS: DESMA

A very special partnership

While Desma is principally known for its advanced injection moulding machines for polyurethane soling systems, it has also been a leading pioneer in the use of automation within the footwear industry using robotic arms from ABB in Sweden. Andreas Klein, head of automation at Desma, can hardly contain his enthusiasm for the exciting developments he has already seen during his career with the company. "Automation means reliability, cost-cutting and perfect reproducibility, which all adds up to top quality products and that is what every customer is looking for."

Co-operation with Swedish ABB began back in the 1980s, with the adaption by Desma of one of its robots especially for use within the footwear industry by placing it alongside one of the company's rotary injection moulding machines. The new concept was first exhibited at the world famous shoe fair in Pirmasens the centre of Germanys footwear industry at that

time, where it caught everyone's attention. This installation was then sent on a world tour where it was exhibited at all the important fairs of the time. All manufacturers who saw the exhibit immediately realised that this was the future of the industry. It was clear to both Desma and ABB that here was a marriage made in heaven.

The very first customer to take delivery was shoe giant adidas, with others quickly following suit. In 1990 alone, 70 robots were supplied to the industry, undertaking tasks such as roughing, spraying release agent and adhesive application. Manufacturers saw the advantages immediately through greatly improved product quality while, at the same time, not only were employees being relieved of hazardous tasks but more accurate use of materials enabled considerable cost savings to be made. Over 1,200 ABB robots have now been supplied to Desma customers all over the world.

As regards the future, Andreas Klein says that "Since the start of this Millennium we have seen a huge

increase in customers needing stand-alone solutions. The introduction of cells means even customers who are producing traditionally can still use Desma technology in terms of sole cells and laser cells. We're also seeing increased interest in the amir c system. Automation is unstoppable and Desma and ABB have grown together strategically and are now able to offer customers unbeatable solutions."

ABB robots supplied through Desma have recently had a face lift by a change of colour from orange to light grey. Although this change might appear to be insignificant, Desma sees it as a major step forward. Originally seen as a source of danger, robots were accordingly painted orange. With the introduction of the YuMi, at the Hannover Fair last year, the way is opening for collaborative work between human operative and robot, where the latter is no longer a hazard, but a colleague. This is reflected in the new colour choice which also marks 30 years of a very successful partnership. 