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Interview Part 2

“I am doing my bit for battery production ‘made in Europe’.” – Interview with Astrid Lemcke

When it comes to future technology at Jagenberg Converting Solutions GmbH (JCS), there‘s no getting around Astrid Lemcke. Born in Saxony-Anhalt, she not only drives innovative solutions, but also imparts knowledge to future generations of the printing industry.

In the previous part of our interview, you mentioned that JCS hasn’t been around for very long and yet is already well established.
What projects and innovations do you have “in the pipeline” for the future?

The biggest project I’m currently working on is GIGABAT, short for “Gigafactory for Batteries”. This is a project funded by the EU Commission. Together with 16 partner companies from Germany, Spain, Italy, France and Sweden, we are driving forward seamless cell production in Europe, not only in terms of machines and systems, but also in terms of the resources and materials used.
Our aim is to create an all-encompassing integrated production value chain for battery cell production in Europe across all companies. The relevance of the topic for European politics and industry is illustrated by the high funding amount of 8 million euros.
In the project, we are working primarily with Excelitas Technologies, the research institute at the University of Braunschweig and PowerCo. Our involvement in GIGABAT also came about through the VW subsidiary PowerCo: Dr. Witt, a member of the Jagenberg Group’s Executive Board, established contact with those responsible at Volkswagen, who were keen to gain us as a project partner for industrial and mechanical engineering. This is a great opportunity for JCS to make a contribution to the mobility of the future.
I am very grateful to be responsible for the project.

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Photo: Sandra Schürmans

> The common ambition of the GIGABAT partners is to build powerful and robust batteries “made in Europe”.
> **Astrid Lemcke, process engineer**

What is JCS’s contribution to the GIGABAT project?
We are participating with a roll-to-roll baking system for the post-drying of anode foils. Our aim here is to accelerate the drying process and also to make it particularly energy-saving and sustainable. Instead of post-drying the anode rolls in vacuum ovens as before, we integrate infrared drying into the roll-to-roll process and thus substantially optimize various aspects of production: process flow, speed, the resources used and the quality of the batteries. This is because drying and the water content of the anode and cathode coating have a significant influence on performance.
The common ambition of the GIGABAT partners is to build powerful and robust batteries “made in Europe”. It is great to be able to make a contribution to this.

What responsibilities do you have within the project?
I am largely responsible for the layout and concept of our part of our plant. You have to know that: We are not building a physical machine but designing a fully functional system down to the smallest details, such as displays on the control panel. The aim is to achieve a Technology Readiness Level (TRL) of greater than seven. This means that we are developing a functional theoretical system that can be put into practice at the end of the project in early 2027.
My other tasks here include the project organization and coordination of the work within JCS and Kampf LSF. I also maintain contact with the EU Commission and our partners. This also includes taking part in the biannual meetings and acting as host in 2025 – because that’s when the scientists, doctoral students and R&D engineers involved will meet here with us.

It sounds like GIGABAT takes up a lot of your time ...
I actually work three out of five working days on the GIGABAT project. There is still time for other things ...

Like what?
... the Digital Printing Academy. This is a training platform founded in 2023 for young talents in the printing industry.
Together with the Carinthia University of Applied Sciences, we have created a top-class training course called “Certified Digital Decor Printing Expert”. I can pass on my knowledge to the next generation of the industry – and, of course, inspire them for our field.
My online lectures serve an international audience of all age groups in companies that already print analog and want to expand their business with digital printing, e.g. by printing laminate flooring or kitchen fronts. In the “Analog Printing Technology” and “Troubleshooting in Analog Printing” courses, I explain how to set up a decor printing system and we talk about problems that occur in analog printing and how they relate to digital printing.

How did the collaboration come about?
DIPA approached Guido Lebbing and he immediately thought it was something for me. And he was right: I had already worked as a chemistry tutor during my studies and I always really enjoyed it. I'm also always learning something new myself. It's simply the case that you learn the most when you teach yourself – and DIPA is ideal for this!

> „[...] you learn the most when you teach yourself – and DIPA is ideal for this!"
> **Astrid Lemcke**

Solving problems, making a difference, teaching and constantly learning: you get the impression that you have arrived at JCS. Do you have any further plans and visions that you are pursuing?
I am very satisfied with my working environment and my tasks. Not out of convenience, but "having arrived" describes it very aptly. I enjoy my work, I have nice colleagues and I can make the most of my inclinations and talents. My life motto "Never stop exploring" doesn't contradict this at all. I feel comfortable and enjoy the freedom that JCS offers me: Home office, flexible working hours, projects that are exciting and don't follow a set pattern. All in all, it's a give and take from which JCS and I benefit equally.
Meanwhile, I don't have a concrete vision for the future, but who knows what it will be in five years' time? At the moment, I'm simply enjoying being at JCS.

Allow me one last question: women are underrepresented in the engineering profession, how does it feel to be a woman working among so many men?
You have to perform and know more than a man to achieve the same status. Simply because key positions are usually held by men and communication is different. I have found that it is immediately easier to work with women who have the same background. You quickly have a basis for communication – just like men have with each other.
But I have also learned to deal with this and to communicate with men. It's particularly easy with colleagues who are calm, very structured and objective – fortunately, that's not untypical in the engineering field.
In any case, I have the impression that at JCS I am not primarily perceived as a woman, but as an engineer. And the appreciation that our managers show me – the responsibility and the exciting tasks – confirm that I've come to the right place!

And you can tell that, Ms. Lemcke! Thank you very much for your time and the nice conversation – all the best for you.