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## Interview

### **“NIMAK has helped the robot welding gun gain acceptance throughout the world”**

**Discussion with Paul Nickel, Managing Partner, and Dr. Niels Hammer, CEO of NIMAK GmbH**

Wissen, June 2017

**Mr. Nickel, your company NIMAK is now the largest German manufacturer of robot welding guns and in the resistance welding technology sector is now considered one of the world’s leading companies. How did you get so far?**

***Paul Nickel:*** My father, who founded our company more than 50 years ago, had good instincts. He realized the highly interesting potentials of the resistance welding technology rather early on. With the invention of the robot welding gun he soon triggered an efficiency revolution in this sector. Nowadays in many production areas - one need only think of the automotive industry - it has become indispensable. NIMAK has helped this technology gain acceptance throughout the world. A consequently pursued innovation strategy throughout the corporate history is certainly also one reason for our encouraging development. But other pioneering decisions have also carried us forward on a successful track. For instance in 2014 the previously separated production sites in Nisterberg and Wissen-Köttingen merged and one year later we merged the adhesive technology sector located at the Spich site into our present company headquarters in Wissen-Frankenthal. That was surely an important basis for our continued growth.

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**Keyword adhesive and dosing technology, a relatively new sector at NIMAK, for which you, Dr. Hammer, are responsible along with automation. What were the reasons for this expansion?**

**Dr. Niels Hammer:** Even though spot welding with robot welding guns is still the fastest and most cost effective joining technology, during the coming 15 years the market will rather tend to stagnate or even decline. Today for example we still have about 3,000 to 5,000 welding points during the construction of an automobile. That will decrease in the future. We are increasingly dealing with a multi-material mix that facilitates weight reduction. Adhesive technology plays an important role here. NIMAK prepared itself for this development early on and developed the technology being offered entirely itself.

**What other products also make NIMAK successful?**

**Dr. Niels Hammer:** Along with robot welding guns we also provide manual welding guns. These are used for sporadic spot welding jobs, for series production and for flexibly deployable rework. They also play an important role for markets where manual manufacture is of considerable importance, for instance in the Russian, Indonesian and Thai automobile industry. Automation solutions and special systems are also included in our product portfolio.

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## **Mr. Nickel, is NIMAK a hidden champion?**

**Paul Nickel:** You can certainly say that. In our customer group and with the relevant points of contact we are certainly a fixed institution. In the sector of robot welding guns we are pleased with our nearly 100 percent name recognition. Also in our automation solutions and special systems, half of all potential clients certainly know us. And in our relatively new adhesion technology business unit our profile is quickly rising. A major order from BMW definitely contributed to that. Nevertheless, NIMAK is a medium-sized company whose name is naturally not known to many. Even though our products are involved in the manufacture of more than 70 percent of all German automobiles and are also used in many other areas, for instance in household appliances, our achievements are simply not visible in the finished product. In that sense not everyone, for sure.

## **NIMAK has established as a technology leader with customers and users. How did you get that far?**

**Paul Nickel:** With a view to throughput, frequency and welding spot quality and even regarding durability, ergonomics and flexibility our welding technology has always been the leader. For us, innovation is the growth driver per se. We make great efforts for the consequent further development of our products and technologies. Our investment rate, at 44 percent, is well above average. It has always been the norm for us to plow profits back into the company. We also place great importance on the close cooperation with scientific institutions, welding technology schools and research institutes as well as universities.

## **Dr. Hammer, which innovations have special significance for NIMAK?**

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**Dr. Niels Hammer:** There are several but I'll concentrate on a couple of outstanding examples. With the "multiframeGUN" we developed a robot welding gun that, thanks to its modular system provides the great flexibility and a super-slim construction with reduced gun weight but also due to its greatly reduced multiplicity of parts, stands out with its cost-effective production and high delivery capability. On top of that, in 2011 NIMAK put the very first robot welding gun with capacitor discharge on the market. Since it does not require water cooling and compressed air and manages with a very low current rating, this technology facilitates a significant reduction of the investment costs. Another NIMAK highlight is the "magneticDrive". With this completely new drive technology the user can vary the power during welding for the very first time. That gave us the breakthrough in spot and projection welding of aluminum that the automobile industry had been waiting for decades, for example.

And in the adhesion technology sector the "a.tron" dosing feeder we developed has become the new standard and facilitates a high degree of dynamism and precision during application. This year we have already presented the second generation of this technology. It facilitates significantly lower wiring expenditures, the omission of a control cabinet and an advantageous price while maintaining the same performance.

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## **Which sectors is NIMAK addressing with these solutions?**

**Paul Nickel:** Traditionally the automotive industry is by far the most important client. Our success depends greatly on the triumph of the robots being used there. Across the globe, we are the sole provider that has been released as a supplier for all premium manufacturers. On the other hand, other sectors are becoming increasingly important to us. That includes consumer goods as well as manufacturers of household appliances. For instance our technologies are asked for in the production of washing machines and even frying pans and vegetable graters. Moreover, we supply companies in the aerospace industry as well as throughout the entire metalworking sector.

## **What markets provide the highest demands for you?**

**Paul Nickel:** NIMAK is represented on a worldwide scale. Our share of exports runs at more than 50 percent. Along with European countries, the markets in China, Mexico, the USA, Russia and Brazil are particularly significant for us. At the same time, the German market is especially important for us. Not only because we generate a significant proportion of our sales here but also because we follow many German customers - especially from the automobile industry - to their international production plants. We work in the USA for VW, BMW and Daimler for instance.

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**Dr. Hammer, you previously told us about some aspects that contribute to the particular strengths of your company while explaining the innovations. What sets NIMAK apart from the competition?**

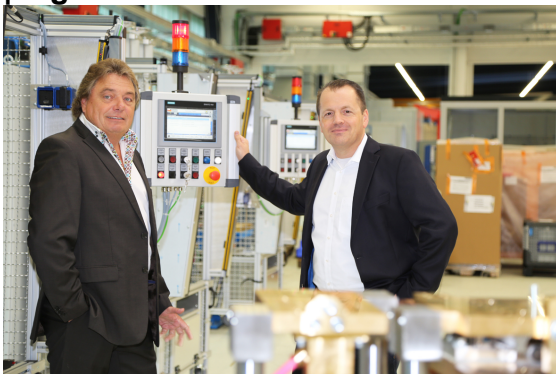
**Dr. Niels Hammer:** Globally, NIMAK is the only company in coupling technology that with resistance welding and adhesives offers two highly efficient and pioneering joining techniques. Together with our automation concepts, our customers get everything from one, single source. In our technology center we work out specific solutions for their requirements. Moreover, we are able to design and construct complete robot cells where on demand we implement the process integration of welding and gluing. This competence is unique in comparison to the competitors. It also creates great investment security for our customers since they are equipped for all requirements and even changing production processes in the future. In resistance welding, on top of that our company offers a spectrum that is unique in the sector. This ranges during power application of direct current through alternating current and medium-frequency technology up to capacitor discharge technology. For the power that needs to be applied we supply servomotorized and electric drives as well as pneumatic systems and, with the mentioned “magneticDrive” a third, outstanding alternative. Furthermore - just to mention one more point - our products are exceptionally energy efficient.

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**That certainly all requires a highly qualified staff and a highly motivated crew...**

**Paul Nickel:** That is entirely correct. At NIMAK, the people and the employees are paramount and their motivation has top priority. The transmission of responsibility is just as much a part of our identity as keeping our employees informed. We communicate the monthly results down to the foreman level and once a month we gather all the employees to let them know about the current business performance and news. Moreover, all the employees receive a bonus that is based on the monthly operating results. All that is apparently very well received since we have virtually no fluctuation. Nevertheless, the continuing lack of specialists is a great challenge for us, too. During our expansion we are urgently looking for both university graduates as well as skilled workers. We could certainly make them an attractive offer to become a part of our success story.

## | Figures:



**Fig. 1:** Paul Nickel and Dr. Niels Hammer  
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**Fig. 2:** Paul Nickel  
Photo: NIMAK GmbH



**Fig. 3:** Dr. Niels Hammer  
Photo: NIMAK GmbH

## | About NIMAK

On a global scale, NIMAK is the only supplier of resistance welding and simultaneously adhesive technology. The company headquartered in Wissen is considered an innovation leader by customers and users. As the inventor of robot welding guns, NIMAK has helped this technology gain acceptance and in this sector is now the largest German and international leading manufacturer. The joining specialist from the Westerwald district is the sole premium supplier of the automobile industry that has the approval to meet customer-specific standards for welding guns. Furthermore, manual welding guns, welding machines and gluing and dosing plants are also included in the product portfolio. The company also develops individualized automation solutions for all applications. With more than 50 years of experience in the “perfect connection”, NIMAK is active around the world. 430 employees support customers from highly diversified sectors - in particular automotive, consumer goods, the aerospace industry and metalworking - with their challenges in production and accompany them in new markets and in uncharted technological territory.



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