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SMEs: Off to new frontiers

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Traditional technologies coupled with Internet-powered solutions are opening up new business models for small and mid-sized enterprises. A look at how a treadmill for horses and an energy management system are adding value for two companies.

We all know the feeling: when we get enough exercise, we have more energy, get a better night's rest, and generally enjoy better health. For horses the same applies – they need exercise too so they can maintain their cardiovascular, respiratory, skeletal and muscular systems. In the wild, horses cover some 60 km per day in their search for food. In captivity, however, far less exercise is the norm. Veterinarians therefore suggest at least an hour's ride every day. Depending on the horse ranch, fulfilling that basic requirement can be difficult.

Oliver Sandmann, CEO of Sascotec, recognized the dilemma and came up with a solution: a horse treadmill, which Sascotec markets under Horsetrainer. The device is more or less like an oversized treadmill at the gym,

except it was designed specifically for horses. For example, special rubber dampers ensure their hoofs land on a soft surface, like that of a forest floor, and a tilting mechanism simulates uphill movement. Horsetrainer helps keep animals in top physical condition, and staff is freed up to take care of other tasks.

Use-based model

But Horsetrainer can't be bought. Instead, stables can rent it from Sascotec and pay according to how often they use it. "The actual use time is recorded and charged at the end of the month," Sandmann explains. How? A digital drive controller wirelessly communicates the use time to Sascotec for billing. Plus, the data delivered to Sascotec indicates when maintenance needs to be done. Technology

integrated into Horsetrainer also includes safety functions. For example, the treadmill shuts off automatically if a horse stumbles and can no longer move in the available space.

All of this is made possible with the LOGO! control system from Siemens' microautomation product line. And it, in turn, can be programmed easily using LOGO! Soft Comfort software. "Programming the machine's control system was child's play," Sandmann confirms. The CMR 2020 GPS takes care of the wireless communications.

Reliable partner

The best place to get components like those employed here are with electrical distributors (or electrical wholesalers). While Siemens generally takes care of the large and complex projects – like outfitting a new factory, or supplying components for an airport – distributors are the source to fulfill day-to-day needs. Through a number of programs, Siemens keeps distributors up to date on products and solutions. Plus, the distributors work with Siemens products to come up with solutions of their own. A perfect example of this type of dedication is the system that REGRO Elektrogroßhandel created for energy management.

REGRO Elektrogroßhandel, a subsidiary of the internationally active REXEL Group, serves the electrical trades and industry in Austria. For its warehouse in Weißkirchen, REGRO Elektro introduced an energy management system. The two driving motivators were to reduce energy costs and lower CO₂ emissions. "First, we had to find out where energy was being used in the warehouse, so we came up with an energy flow diagram," says Michael Hauser, head of REGRO Industry. "We then developed a measuring concept using technology from Siemens," he explains further.

The next step was to analyze the data and derive activities to lower energy use. For this, REGRO Elektrogroßhandel engineers created applications using the cloud-based MindSphere solution from Siemens. "We now have a transparent overview of where we are using energy in the warehouse, and that has helped us take concrete steps to save money," reports Michael Hauser.

REGRO Elektrogroßhandel has gone a step further and is now offering its customers the same solution to manage energy in their buildings. The package involves Siemens components and the REGRO Elektrogroßhandel application based on MindSphere. What's more, REGRO Elektro has even set up a training center in Weißkirchen where customers can learn about energy management systems. Not only does REGRO Elektrogroßhandel save money in its own



Digitalization is the use of digital technologies to change an existing business model or to create a new one.

Internet of Things refers to the connection of devices to the Internet and to each other.

Cloud computing employs servers and files that are stored in a centralized location as opposed to the individual PC. A stable Internet connection is a prerequisite for cloud computing.



warehouse, it also drives a new business in energy management. A win-win situation.

Taking the first step

The examples above may be from different sectors, but they have one thing in common: the use of budding digitalization technologies. No, digitalization isn't just for the big players – small and mid-sized enterprises (SMEs) are already taking advantage of the benefits that digitalization offers. The numbers prove it: four out of five SMEs have invested in

digital projects over the past three years, a study commissioned by German development bank KfW Group shows.

Experts concur: for SMEs, the first steps toward digitalization should be small and simple. Even something as straightforward as Horsetrainer can usher in new business models. And when distributors get involved in the act, such as REGRO Elektro has with energy management, they can profit in more ways than one. It just takes the first step to start the digitalization journey.

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