Heated partially by scrap wood from its production process, Nedo's main plant lies in Germany. They also manufacture products in Switzerland.

HAPPY 100!

The family behind the business (from left): Walter Fischer, Dr. Thomas Fischer, and Frank Fischer

Nedo, a German-based manufacturer and distributor of a large variety of surveying products, recently celebrated its 100 anniversary. As if that wasn't impressive enough, the company remains family owned and is now directed by the fourth generation of the Fischer family. *Professional Surveyor Magazine* sat down with company president Frank Fischer for this interview at the 2008 Intergeo conference.

Q *As the result of economic pressures, most independent, family-owned manufacturers have been acquired by and are now part of larger international corporations. How has Nedo succeeded in remaining an independent, family-owned business?*

A As a family-owned business, we are used to making decisions that are beneficial for the company in the long run. One-hundred-percent commitment to the long-term growth of the company and a conservative risk management have been the key values of the Nedo management for generations. As a result, we are financially strong enough to remain independent.

Q *Nedo prides itself on being a pioneer in the surveying and measuring tool industry. How do you spot industry trends and respond with the tools surveyors want and need?*

A We maintain good relationships with surveying equipment dealers all over the world and with all major instrument manufacturers. In addition, we keep close contacts to professional surveyors who use our products and to universities.

From all these groups we receive massive feedback. As an example of the result of this, Nedo had developed and patented the quick release locking system for tripods that is now used by many other tripod manufacturers, too.

Q *When so many companies are going offshore to manufacture their surveying products, how do you manage to maintain costs with all your production taking place in Germany or Switzerland?*

A We spent a lot of time and money to streamline our internal procedures and introduce highly automated production facilities. Of course, we source raw materials and parts globally; however, we keep the quality control in Europe. This strategy allows us to keep the cost down and the know-how and the jobs in Germany or Switzerland. At the moment, we employ 135 people in Germany and 20 in Switzerland. A second positive aspect of our strategy is the fact that we can guarantee a consistent high level of quality.

Q *Custom-made equipment is something Nedo has always offered its customers. What is the demand for custom-made equipment and could you give us an example of a recent need that required specially designed and built products?*

A From time to time we get inquiries for custom-made equipment. The amount of business we do with this is rather small; however, it is growing and provides a good way to distinguish ourselves from our competitors. Another positive aspect of custom equipment is the fact that sometimes these products result in new products for our standard program.

A recent example relates to our new illuminated bar code leveling rod, LumiScale. After having launched LumiScale, we got in touch with a surveying company who specializes in monitoring building structures. They were excited about the new rods and the possibility to work with digital levels even under poor-light conditions. However, their application was different. They wanted to install the LumiScale rods in an old church in Austria to monitor the building for several weeks. We modified the LumiScale leveling rods accordingly by cutting the length and equipping the products with a different power supply.

Q *Being an "environmentally friendly company" is something we see on much of your corporate literature. What does this mean?*

A We have gone to great lengths to be an environmentally friendly company. The entire production process has been optimized to reduce waste.

For processing metal parts, we use bio-degenerable cooling lubricants only. Solvents have been banned from our factory after we installed a fully automatic powder coating facility. For heating our facility, we use wood left over from the production process. The smoke gas is cleaned with high-tech air purification facilities to reduce the harmful substances to a minimum. Our buildings are equipped with the latest insulation materials to save energy. At the moment, we are considering installing solar panels on our buildings to generate electrical power.

Q *What are the benefits and disadvantages of working with fellow family members?*

A Today, Nedo is managed by my dad Walter Fischer, my brother Dr. Thomas Fischer, and myself. We have always had a very good relationship, and we have always enjoyed doing things together. We share the same values and vision of our company. Trust and 100-percent commitment to the same goals are big benefits for our business.

Q *Were you brought up to take over the family business, and are you and your siblings planning on turning the company over to your children?*

A Neither I nor my brother was forced to join the company. When we were kids, we spent more time in the factory than at home. I personally never had a doubt that joining Nedo would be the right decision for me. As a result, my education at a university was focused on my further career at Nedo. Now, the fifth generation is still in diapers, so they don't really know what it means to work for Nedo. Of course, it would be great if they might join the company one day, but no one will be forced to do so.

Q *Where do you see Nedo ten years from today, and what changes do you foresee in the surveying industry's future?*

A Within the next 10 years, we will increase our global presence. We will address markets where we are not yet well presented and will come up with new, innovative surveying accessories that help professional surveyors do a better job. Within the next 10 years, satellite navigation will be more important than today. GPS, Galileo, GLONASS, and maybe additional systems will be available, resulting in lower prices for the receivers and a broader market.

▲ An assembly area in the plant