



bauelemente bau in conversation with Gerhard and Moritz Ebert, CEOs of 3E Datentechnik GmbH

"Digitalization has reached the sector"

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Moritz Ebert: "We see our strengths in the determined cooperation with our partners for joint customers and our openness to new ideas. "

Photo: bauelemente bau

3E Datentechnik GmbH, based in Oberkochen near Aalen, can look back on a proud 30 years of existence this year and is therefore celebrating a significant company anniversary. In an interview with the CEOs Gerhard and Moritz Ebert, we talked about the company's development, the current challenges, which projects are planned for the future and how far the generational change has already progressed.

On a milestone birthday like this, we cannot not ask a retrospective question. In your opinion, what were the key milestones in the company's history?

Gerhard Ebert: The decisive milestone was the decision to be the first company to develop Windows-based software for the wood window sector. At that time, there were only solutions for the industry based on the DOS operating system. By opting for Windows, we had a technological advantage in the market. Thanks to the numerous advantages, such as the higher usability via drag&drop, large companies approached us quite quickly. We then immersed ourselves in the ERP world through partnerships with established ERP providers and interfaces. The experience we gained and the knowledge we acquired are still paying off today.

Moritz Ebert: To me, the construction of the new, future-proof headquarters here in Oberkochen represent a very important milestone in the company's history as well. This is a commitment to the location and to our team.

How has 3E dealt with the coronavirus pandemic in the recent past and what impact has the pandemic had on the company?

Gerhard Ebert: At the beginning of the pandemic, there was naturally a lot of panic and uncertainty, as we had never experienced a situation like this before. Thanks to our infrastructure and hardware, we were quickly able to offer our employees the opportunity to work from home. Due to the positive experience we made, we have also been offering a hybrid working model ever since.

Moritz Ebert: We clearly felt the uncertainties not only internally, but also within the sector. Despite the uncertainties on the market at the time, we were able to successfully complete all projects, albeit with a few delays. The pandemic also caused our customers and partners to rethink their approach to digitalization. Looking back, we would therefore say that we have benefited economically from the pandemic.

With what expectations - not only economically, but also with regard to issues affecting the sector, such as the war in Ukraine, inflation, the slump in new construction or the hope at the

time of an increase in the renovation rate - did you approach your birthday year?

Moritz Ebert: Socially and globally, we are running from one crisis to the next. That's why we don't have any special expectations. The sector is currently struggling again with a number of burdens and numerous problems to overcome. However, we at 3E are well positioned and therefore believe we are on the right track. Our optimism is somewhat cautious. We expect even greater digitalization, as this remains an important topic for the future. Digitalization has now reached the sector.

Gerhard Ebert: I am personally very sad about the current situation in Ukraine and could never have imagined it. We need to do more to create an awareness of sustainable living again. We can't expect that everything will automatically be fine again. At the moment, however, I am somewhat at a loss.

And what are your plans for the next few years? What sales targets have you set yourself?

Moritz Ebert: We have not set ourselves any specific sales targets. We are a medium-sized family business and want to grow organically, as we have done extremely well in recent years. We want to continuously expand our presence in the main markets of Germany, France, Switzerland and Austria. We have made good progress in the Dutch market and will continue to strengthen our position. Another market we are focusing on is the UK. We intend to develop the company slowly, steadily and healthily. We also want to increase our investments in the wood sector in the future and convince other companies of our solution. We see wood as a very important raw material, both in terms of value creation and sustainability.

Many of your customers are window manufacturers. How do you currently perceive the situation on the German window market?

Gerhard Ebert: New construction is declining sharply, which has not yet been as noticeable in refurbishment. In the PVC sector in particular, capacity utilization is no longer as high as it was a few years ago. Price pressure is increasing in

this segment in particular, but we are not yet seeing this in the wood sector.

Moritz Ebert: The supply chains and inflation are currently developing in such a way that window manufacturers can once again calculate fairly reliably. We are receiving different sentiments from the market, whereby the willingness to provide information is sometimes difficult. In addition to the uncertainty, many companies also see the need to invest right now in these difficult times, if they can. However, companies clearly want the government to provide more subsidies.

Mr. Ebert, five years ago, in our interview on the occasion of 3E's 25th anniversary, you said that the handover would happen "sooner than some people expected". It is not that we want to get rid of you, but we are of course interested to know when you plan to start enjoying your well-deserved retirement?

Gerhard Ebert: There is no fixed date yet. At the moment, I'm mainly working on the product and would like to tweak a few things there. However, the management and organization are entirely in Moritz's hands, and I am very happy with the way he is handling everything. Nevertheless, I still want to offer some protection, especially in these difficult times. My workload has decreased significantly and I've never had as much vacation as this year.

Moritz Ebert: We both believe that we work very well as a team. My father has an understanding of the sector and experience that is incredibly valuable. Nevertheless, the generational change is progressing and will take place over the next few years. The aim must be for my father to be able to go into well-deserved retirement and only support and advise me in case of questions.

The first "GoFuture Award" was conferred this year at the 10th NETZWERK Partner Day. Will there be a sequel next year and have you already received some registrations?

Gerhard Ebert: The call for entries for the next "GoFuture Award" is already open. The award ceremony will take place as part of the 11th NETZWERK Partner Day on February 1 in Heidenheim.

Moritz Ebert: We received a lot of positive feedback on this year's award. Of course, this encourages us to continue to announce and confer the award. The NETZWERK Partner Days are the perfect platform for this event.

And how has the "Together Better" network developed in the meantime?

Gerhard Ebert: Together Better means that, together with the supplier industry (profiles, hardware, panels, sun protection, etc.) and the equipment industry (machines, tools), we create solutions for joint customers that take a lot of work off users' hands and also help them make progress with digitalization. The need for this is growing among our customers. Many suppliers want to become part of the 3E Together Better family based on recommendations. With "Together Better", we have created a brand and made it clear that cooperation is one of the cornerstones of 3E's values. Cooperation and the openness associated with it is developing magnificently. The aim is for partners to benefit from synergies in the areas of shared master data, IoT and digital process chains.

In your own words, what are the strengths and special features of the company?

Moritz Ebert: True to our motto "Together Better", we see our strengths in our determined cooperation with our customers and our openness to new ideas. Another special feature is our claim to be at the forefront of technology. With our "enabler" philosophy, our customers can rely on future-proof, open-minded and contemporary solutions. We always ensure a high degree of flexibility and want to meet our customers at eye level.

Gerhard Ebert: Our "roll-up-your-sleeves" mentality sets us apart from others. We always want to find joint solutions with our customers instead of imposing something on them. However, it must be emphasized that the team plays a decisive role here. When it comes to software, we see our strengths and special features primarily in the scalability, open database, end-to-end digitalization and technological standards.

What wishes and suggestions do you receive from the market and how do you implement them at 3E?

Gerhard Ebert: The functionality requirements, such as in the area of multi-client capability or shipping logistics, vary greatly from country to country and from customer to customer. We are currently receiving a lot of suggestions and requests regarding cloud capability, BIM, IoT and dealer solutions. Of course, costs are also a constant topic.

Moritz Ebert: We want to further expand and strengthen our focus on consulting. That's why we are in close contact with customers to identify possible improvements and potential and then to implement these things. With "3E Input", we have recently launched a new portal where customers can submit suggestions and improvements on two topics from current modules. The suggestions are then evaluated and their possible implementation checked, in some cases with the direct involvement of customers.

What other projects are planned for the future?

Moritz Ebert: We are working flat out to upgrade our solutions to a new version of the software architecture. This is very important for our future viability and will bring an increase in performance and security for our customers. Furthermore, we want to be fully web-enabled in the future and we will also be redesigning our app. In addition to the topics mentioned, we have many other projects in the pipeline which we have developed ourselves or together with suppliers and which are currently still being worked on. We intend to present these at the relevant trade shows in the coming year.

Gerhard Ebert: We are continuing to work on having all the skills we need to master the issues of the future. In addition to the projects already mentioned, the focus is also on expanding our seminar and training programs. We want to offer new formats both in person and online and round off our range of services. The key here is to keep our customers fit. We are not resting on our laurels and want to keep going full throttle. We

do not just want to have the best customers, we also want to make the best customers.

You attended the FIT Show in Birmingham for the first time this year. How would you sum up this trade show and will further participations follow?

Gerhard Ebert: We draw a thoroughly positive summary of the trade show in the UK. We were able to get to know the market better and made many contacts that we now want to build on. That is why we will continue to exhibit at the FIT Show in the future.

Moritz Ebert: The UK market shows great potential, which is why we are aiming to acquire more customers there. We want to continue to work closely with our current partners to develop and implement joint solutions. We also want to be seen as an "enabler" in the UK.

Next year's Fensterbau Frontale is the sector trade show for windows and doors. Will 3E be exhibiting there as usual and are there even more trade shows planned in Germany?

Gerhard Ebert: In addition to Fensterbau Frontale, we will be exhibiting at R+T in Stuttgart for the first time next year. As many of our customers are exhibitors there themselves and numerous visitors from the window construction sector can be found there, we decided to attend this trade show. Of course, we will also be back at Bau 2025 with our own stand.

Is there also a big celebration planned this year to mark the anniversary?

Gerhard Ebert: We will be celebrating this year's anniversary together with our employees.

Moritz Ebert: Instead of a big celebration like on the occasion of our 25th anniversary, we want to reward our employees in addition to the internal celebration.

Gerhard and Moritz Ebert, thank you for the interview!

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