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Safety in Motion

Since its foundation in Germany in 1968, initially as a producer of swing doors for lifts, the Wittur Group has grown to become a leading international manufacturer and supplier of elevator components with operations in more than 50 countries around the world.

Images by Karlis Sulcs

The Wittur Group is well-known as a global supplier of components, modules, and systems for the elevator industry. It is one of the largest independent suppliers in the world with an extensive global manufacturing footprint and sales network and a broad portfolio of products, ranging from elevator doors or car and counterweight frames, to complete elevator packages. The group has around 3,300 employees working in 10 production plants and 20 sales companies across the world. Installation of elevators and maintenance services are not part of Wittur's business.

Dr Walter Rohregger has been leading the Wittur Group as CEO and Chairman of the Executive Management Team since February 2012. He has a PhD in mechanical engineering from the Polytechnic University of Turin, Italy. Following the completion of his doctorate, he worked for the leading global British automotive and aerospace components company GKN, which is based close to Birmingham. During his 25-year tenure there, he was able to gain significant international and professional experience.

"I have moved around the world quite a bit, actually. I moved to Asia in the mid-90s, first to Japan,

and then I lived in China for three years, after that in Singapore for seven, and then back to China," Walter says. "I then relocated to the GKN headquarters in the UK, where besides heading one of GKN's divisions, I was part of the GKN group's executive team. In 2007, I ended up moving to Warwick with my family. I like the culture, the sense for history, the country's green landscape and the temperature in the United Kingdom. I'm not a guy who likes the 24/7 heat I experienced in Singapore, but frankly speaking, I wouldn't mind less rain in the UK. So that's how this Italian guy ended up living and working in the United Kingdom." ›

ELEVATOR SHEET DISTRIBUTION EXPERT – ZMMC



Zhejiang Metals and Materials Co., Ltd (hereinafter referred to as ZMMC) was founded in 1963, and was restructured to be a large state-holding group enterprise in 2003.

ZMMC is a chief member enterprise of Zhejiang Materials Industry Group, which was ranked 345th among the 2014 Fortune Global 500 list, one of the largest bulk commodities circulation service integrated providers in China, extremely large state-owned enterprise directly under Zhejiang Provincial Government and the first among Zhejiang top 100 list since 2007.

Currently ZMMC has been developed into a large group enterprise with metal materials circulation as its major business. Its total assets exceed US\$2 billion. In 2014 its sales revenue reached US\$1.5 billion. Our company has been awarded as industry leader of China Metal Materials Circulation and AAA Credit Excellent Enterprise.

We mainly provide cold plates, hot plates, and galvanized sheet distribution service. Our main customers are KONE, OTIS, and Schindler, and we provide more than 400,000 tonnes of sheets for our customers.

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While at GKN, Walter was responsible for expanding the business in the Asia-Pacific region, driving it forward through organic growth, acquisitions, and joint ventures. He was in charge of the automotive division first, then the construction, mining, and agriculture segments, which included the functional areas of manufacturing, technical development, and sales. In 2012, he started a new professional chapter and took up the top position at Wittur Group. "I met the chairman of Wittur, who was the previous CEO at KONE Elevators—one thing led to another, and here I am," Walter says.

Walter's aim for Wittur Group is to be the leading global strategic partner for eco-efficient solutions for components, modules, and systems in the elevator industry. He intends to position the company as leader in quality and technology with its customers. Headquartered in Wiedenzhausen, Germany, the Wittur Group is already achieving these goals today. The Wittur brand is established all over the world; the company has subsidiaries across Europe, Eurasia, Asia, and Latin America; and it is a place where people are happy to work.

"We are the number-one independent elevator components supplier in the world," Walter states. "Just to give you an idea, last year we generated a turnover of around €520 million. The second independent elevator components supplier (a player in our market segment with the same product portfolio) has a turnover of less than half this amount. There are only two players with a turnover of around €150–€200 million and then the next one is below €50 million. As you can see, we are the largest, most global supplier in the elevator industry. We are the company with the largest product portfolio with all main elevator components, modules, and systems including doors, safety devices, gearless drives, cars, slings, and counterweight frames. Our products can be used for new



"We are the number-one independent elevator components supplier in the world."

- Dr. Walter Rohregger



installations or for retrofitting as well as for spare parts. It is important to make it clear that Wittur does not install elevators or carry out any maintenance services, as we leave this to our customers, the lift installers."

Wittur Group's history dates back to the late 1960s when Horst Wittur founded the business in Germany at the age of 26 with a start-up capital of 2,000 Deutschmark. The privately-owned company was established as Wittur-Aufzugteile GmbH & Co.

CIXI CITY HONGFENG ELEVATOR FITTINGS CO. LTD

Established in 1996, **Cixi City Hongfeng Elevator Fittings Co., Ltd** is a professional manufacturer and exporter that is specialised in elevator door system components. We have over 45,000 square meters, and more than 500 workers. We are located in Cixi City, Ningbo, China, with convenient transportation access.

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Co, and traded in lift components and produced lift swing doors. Walter says it then grew considerably over the following years, largely by acquisition, until Horst unfortunately experienced some financial difficulties.

“The owner was basically forced out by the banks, and the business was taken over in the year 2004. This is the backstory. In simple words, first the banks granted several loans to Mr Wittur to support aggressive growth, and then demanded repayment in a timeframe which he unfortunately couldn’t meet. It really is a sad story. Mr Wittur passed away in early 2010 and I never had the chance to meet him. I really believe that he was a great visionary and I have aimed to build on his vision for the company in this industry.”

Wittur Group’s international expansion started early on in its timeline. In 1977, it established a production plant in Colorno, Italy, and three years later it set up a plant in Zaragoza, Spain. Also during this time, and up until the early 1990s, trading companies were established in the Netherlands, France, Australia, and Hong Kong.

In 1993, production was started in Turkey and two years later, Wittur Group expanded its presence into Asia, establishing a joint venture in China, which shortly afterwards became a wholly foreign-owned enterprise now known as Wittur Elevator Components (Suzhou). This facility has expanded rapidly and today produces more than 900,000 elevator doors annually. In 2000, Wittur Group moved into the South American market by acquiring a plant in Argentina and

“It was exciting to enter this industry with a background in automotive, aerospace, and construction.”

- Dr Walter Rohregger

establishing an assembly plant in Brazil. Less than a decade later, the company expanded into Slovakia and India.

In 2010, Wittur Group was acquired by the private equity companies Triton and Capvis. This gave Wittur the financial backbone it needed to invest in new markets, products, and the organisation. It also enabled Wittur to have a greater international influence and secure customers such as KONE Elevators, Otis Elevator Company, ThyssenKrupp, and Schindler Group. In March 2015, the Wittur Group changed hands once more and was acquired by US-based Bain Capital.

Walter’s extensive business acumen has prepared him well to lead the company on its future journey. “It was exciting to enter this industry with a background in automotive, aerospace, and >



this business for many years to come.

“On the other hand, we are also driven by the demographic change of an increasing elderly population. What does this mean? More and more people are finding it difficult to use stairs, more are using wheelchairs, and therefore we can expect an increased number of lifts which need to be retrofitted in buildings. Additionally, we are experiencing an increased safety awareness which leads to higher safety requirements, thereby again triggering the need for upgrading existing elevators.

construction,” he says. “Why? On the one hand, I learned that elevator growth depends on long-term positive trends like the increasing number of buildings driven by population booms and increasing urbanisation, as well as an ongoing ageing and bigger installed elevator base. These drivers will continue to contribute to the growth of

“For me, entering into this business was about taking a simple approach. It was clear that a fresh mindset was needed: a focus on quality, on-time delivery and product innovation—basically satisfying our customers’ expectations. However, the supporting platform was clearly missing: the continuous improvement culture which I was

accustomed to in the automotive industry was entirely lacking, and this was exactly where I stepped in.

“Let’s look at the quality of the products we supply. We aim to continuously raise the bar in terms of quality, which is the key driving force for safety within the elevator industry. Our catchphrase is ‘Safety in Motion’—a philosophy which is visibly embedded in all of our operations around the world,” Walter says. With a wide network of sales representatives covering more than 50 countries and a workforce of over 3,300 people, improving quality performance is a continuous priority. The Wittur Group is committed to exercising the same production excellence standard at each of its 10 manufacturing sites and this consistency ensures products are of the highest quality and produced efficiently using environmentally-friendly processes. “At Wittur, we call this the Wittur Production System—WPS,” Walter notes.

The WPS was created to help the business achieve its quality goals. It uses what’s known as ‘lean production’ criteria, which consists of analysing the production processes and putting in place a strict employee training program. It implies that the whole organisation and its functions are focused on the same targets. The exact same system has been set up in all Wittur production facilities. This means that every single employee is engaged in the achievement of the overall targets. The WPS results in a high level of product quality, flexibility, fast service, on-time delivery, and other advantages.

Walter observes, “Additionally, WPS covers the safety of our employees and visitors in our plants. It is our responsibility to make sure that every single employee arrives safely back home every single day. I have been rolling this mindset culture out in all the plants. A perfect example is our plant in China where, despite

an annual growth of up to 25 per cent, we have managed to implement a lean culture across the whole shopfloor and throughout the whole organisation. With China currently representing more than 50 per cent of the world’s elevator installations and us producing around 6,000 complete door sets per day there, it is obvious why it is a top priority to ensure that all 6,000 doors have zero defects. As a result, just a few months ago we won the coveted Supplier Quality Award for 2014 from our customer KONE.

“Everybody is aware of the safety expectations for a car, but have you ever given thought to safety in an elevator? You basically ride up and down in an elevator without even realising that you are fully exposed. You have no control once you are inside an elevator, so I always say that the safety expectations for an elevator need to be much higher than for a car. As the awareness of safety increases, elevators will

Dr Walter Rohregger in discussion with Wittur Group CFO Dr Daniel Wiest



require more sophisticated safety devices. There will be upgrades of elevators on the one hand, and a demand for new elevators in line with higher safety requirements on the other hand. Assuming the design is right, the quality is essential to guaranteeing the expected safety, and therefore a consistently high level of quality can only be achieved through >



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“We have one of the strongest sales networks in our industry.”

- Dr Walter Rohregger

stable processes and excellent professionals. This is exactly where the continuous improvement mindset culture comes in.

“Wittur supplies elevator components to the major industry players (the multinationals or MNCs) who have the know-how and resources to design complete elevators, and also to the vast number of small players around the world. These independents often have less design resources available, so we tend to supply larger modules or complete elevators to them. There are literally thousands and thousands of independents. For example, in Stockholm there are many companies you can contact if you want an elevator and then they install it. For these independents, we typically supply packages or complete elevators, so it’s easier for them to serve the demands of their customers with their limited engineering resources.



“Customer proximity is vital in our business and we have therefore implemented a key account management system for our multinational customers and a local approach for our independent customers in the

different countries. I would say that we have one of the strongest sales networks in our industry and this has really helped us to reach out to small installers, the aforementioned independents. I think it is absolutely necessary to have a trading company in Sweden which serves the local Swedish market, a trading company in the UK for the UK/Ireland, and so on. We get close to our customers and make sure that we have an understanding of their needs—with a local sales force in the local language.”

The Wittur Group has five ‘R&D Centres of Competence’, with each centre focusing on product-specific research and development. The aim is to understand the regulatory norms and future customer requirements—basically to develop products in line with demand. The Wittur Group today holds more than 300 international patents, which reflects its strong engineering capability. It has

established a new ‘consultant business arm’ with the intention of offering support to smaller customers, architects, and consultants, who sometimes do not have the resources to remain updated on regulatory norms or who only have limited resources or know-how with regard to design or the calculation of complete elevator systems.

The Wittur Group boasts test towers at its plants in Austria, Germany, and Spain, as well as specialised testing labs for doors, drives, safety systems, and complete systems. Also, there are ongoing activities for product certification according to existing and new directives and standards, which are often very country specific.

“Having talked about quality, on-time delivery and innovation, it is also important to bring this mindset to the Wittur supplier base. As a consequence, Wittur’s supplier base has already and will continue to be further reduced.



We focus on supply-chain excellence with our key suppliers and business partners,” Walter says. “I think that certainly this is a really important aspect to focus on in order to achieve the goals we have set.

“As a global company, we need to have a strong base of global suppliers. When I choose global suppliers, I want them to follow a similar pattern to us and have similar values. I always consider which suppliers complement >



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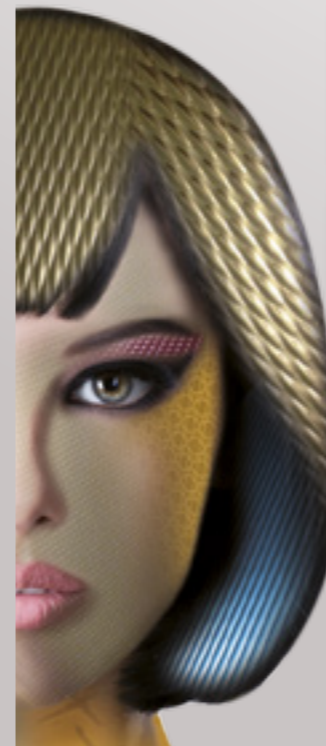
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The company was founded in 2009 and is located in Wujiang District, Suzhou City, Li Li, 318 National Road, with convenient transportation and a beautiful environment. The company is engaged in mechanical design, manufacturing, and precision sheet metal processing. With professional, technical, and management personnel to provide customers with first-class professional services as well as the perfect pre-sale and after-sales service. The company has advanced sheet metal equipment including CNC punching machine, precision bending machine, and other processing equipment. The company's products have been successfully and widely used in electronics, instruments, metres, medical equipment, industrial control, communications, and other fields, and are exported to Europe and the United States market.

The company, through the establishment and implementation of quality management system in accordance with GB/T19001 2008 standards, will greatly strengthen the internal management, better meet customer needs, and increase development.

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Wittur and which suppliers have engineering resources to support Wittur, also with regard to the localisation of products.

“For us, it is fundamental to have suppliers which are able to follow us globally and have the same focus on quality and a continuous improvement mindset.”

Walter says he has seen huge benefits from the close and direct relationships Wittur has with all of the Wittur Group's suppliers. In Asia alone, the organisation has around 90 suppliers, reduced from 150. “I always have to think about how I can select and also develop my suppliers,” Walter says. “If the suppliers are not up to speed with the expected supply performance, we need to be the filter for bad quality.”

In 2013, Walter and his team proudly inaugurated the Wittur Academy—a training centre where sales teams and other staff gain knowledge about Wittur elevators and components, the overall

marketplace, and the culture of the business. The academy facilities include a high-tech classroom as well as several workshop areas where trainees can perform various tasks during hands-on sessions, such as assembling doors, adjusting sliding guides, and fine-tuning frequency inverters or lift controllers. Based in two locations—Wiedenzhausen (Europe) and Suzhou (China)—the development centres provide staff with turnkey training packages on installation, single components, complete elevator systems as well as norms and directives for technical and commercial staff. Furthermore, Wittur representatives are actively involved in the elevator associations and are also at the forefront of the development of industry norms and directives.

At the Wittur Group, the core value of quality goes beyond products, processes, and service, and this is exemplified in the work of its academy. People are in the centre of the group's commitment to high

“For us, it is fundamental to have suppliers which are able to follow us globally and have the same focus on quality.”

- Dr Walter Rohregger



XINTONGLIAN PACKING

Founded in 1992, **Shanghai Xintonglian Packing Co., Ltd.** is a professional supplier for one-stop logistics solutions. Now XTL group has developed a set of products including wooden boxes, cartons, plastic packaging, iron packaging, paper, and wood combination solutions, offering the service from consulting, design, production, on-site packing, logistics, and distribution.

Our headquarters is in Shanghai and we also have facilities at Shanghai Baoshan, Shanghai Minhang, Wuxi, Suzhou, Chongqing, Wuhan, and Wuhu. We have the honour being among the top 50 in China's packaging industry. In 2015 May, XTL's stock was issued on Shanghai Stock Exchange. Our core value is offering excellent service for excellent enterprises through innovation.



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quality standards, and by developing excellent sales skills, they aim to provide the highest level of service to their customers worldwide.

Wittur Academy also opens up its doors to customers and suppliers so that they too can experience the Wittur way of doing business. "It is just terrific to have customers and suppliers come here. We can show them our products; they can see them, touch them and even install them and, more importantly, we get their feedback right away."

Walter believes there are several key aspects that make the Wittur Group unique, giving it a clear distinction in the marketplace. "The first is economy of scale," he says. "We are more than twice the size of any of our competitors and

"We can invest where others struggle to compete simply because we are bigger."

- Dr Walter Rohregger

therefore have a purchase volume that others do not have.

"We can invest where others struggle to compete simply because we are bigger. We have resident engineers at our customers and specialised professionals from other industries for various global roles, whereas smaller companies might just have one person dedicated to each segment of the business. If you are small, you just can't afford those extra costs. Wittur is also able to attract the best people to join the team. If I make a phone call and I say who Wittur is, I am able to attract people much better than some of the smaller players. I am also capable of convincing people from much bigger organisations to join our team.

"The next important factor is technology. For me, technology is

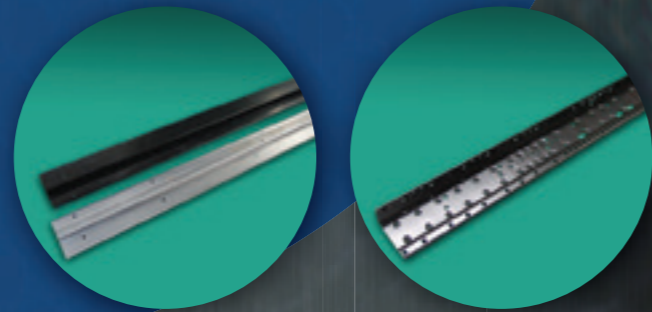
crucial, and I am personally convinced that there are a couple of issues that need to be addressed. The first one is the continuous improvement of the functionality, modularity, and scalability of our products. The second is innovation, and today we have a small and effective central research and development team, which brings together all the resources we need to create innovative solutions.

"We have more than 100 people in the whole organisation who are moving together and are aligned. We are able to understand the real needs of our customers and the industry. I always say that I want to be shaping the future, not just following behind everyone else.

"The last one is the organisation. We are now present in all of the continents of the world: Europe, >



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is located in a new technology industrial development zone, Suzhou City, JiangSu province, near Shanghai City and Zhejiang province. The company has registered capital of \$800 million, a staff of 150 people, and mainly produces all kinds of sheet metal parts, with Japanese CNC punching machine, bending machine, and various types of punching machines, laser cutting machine, molding rolling line, the company has passed ISO9001:2008 certification.



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“We have brought together a very good blend of people and I think today we are in a position where we now have a matrix which works well for us.”

- Dr Walter Rohregger

South America, Eurasia, India, China, and the SEA countries—except for North America. So when having an organisation which has to operate across all of these locations, the only way we can make it work is by having a matrix organisation with regional P&L responsibilities and global leaders for the key business processes.

“We have brought together a very good blend of people and I think today we are in a position where we now have a matrix which works well for us. We have worked towards this for the past two years—a global, virtual, multicultural team.”

In March this year, Wittur Group released an innovative publication called *LIFTISMORE*. The book focuses on special elevator projects which were developed by Wittur Group in collaboration with architects and consultants from all over the world. Its aim is to showcase special architectural projects where the elevator design was considered not only for its usefulness and functionality but also as an element of style. In these cases, the elevator is looked at as an additional space where the pen of the designer can incorporate the overall building concept.

The engineers at Wittur Group believe that certain elements of an architectural design, such as the elevator system, must first and foremost provide a safe and reliable transportation solution for the people living and working in the respective buildings. This is why many building designs, despite being impressive, sometimes fail to be innovative as far as the elevator systems are concerned—they treat elevators as a necessary commodity instead of an element of design in itself. To address this, Wittur Group ensures it develops special elevator components in line with the original vision of the architects to bring their innovative designs to life.

The advancements in technological development within



the elevator component industry have taken away most structural limitations which architects of the past had to deal with. In today's twenty-first century there is the freedom to push the boundaries and design elevators which are far from run of the mill.

Wittur Group is proud to have been involved in a number of prestigious projects in the building, railway, hotel, airport, marine, retail, and special project industries around the world. Examples include the inclined elevator Rio de la Pila in Santander, Spain, the



a 1,500-square-metre modern lightweight construction in the middle of the exhibition centre. The 'WITTUR CUBE' will be exclusively dedicated to Wittur and is set to become the new focal point of the Interlift."

Looking forward, Walter says he will focus on five core strategic points to ensure that Wittur Group stays ahead of the game in the elevator industry. His first point is focused around customer diversification and ensuring that the business caters for a wide variety of clientele. "For me, customer diversification clearly means intensifying the relationship with existing customers and getting to know customers that we don't have—both on a multinational and local scale. We may be a global company, but I want Wittur to be seen as a local business which is close to where the demand is: 'Be global, act local!'"

To this end, Wittur Group is looking to roll out more sales

Apple stores in New York and London, the Queen Victoria cruise ship, China's Beijing Airport, Eurotheum Hotel in Frankfurt, Germany, the metro of Hong Kong, and Cardinal Place in London.

Preparations are in full swing for the 'Interlift', a key international exhibition for elevators,

components and accessories, which will take place October 13–16 at the Exhibition Centre in Augsburg, Germany. As in the previous years, Wittur will display its wide range of solutions for new installations and modernisation as well as a selection of new products from its R&D centres. "We are very excited about our new exhibition platform,



further is the other—both aspects are critical to success."

The last point is the focus on growth: Wittur has a resilient and profitable business model and has demonstrated successful long-term growth. "We aim to continue on this successful path, both organically and also through acquisitions, should interesting opportunities arise," Walter says.

"Let me emphasise this: the elevator industry is something like eight or 10 years behind the automotive industry in its development. For me, this is an ideal situation. Why? Coming from the automotive sector, I believe that while all the relevant optimisation processes have already been implemented in the automotive sector, Wittur can be ahead of its competitors in the elevator business. We have the opportunity to create something that people can and will talk about. What we develop will be noticed and our competitors are not sleeping. This means that we can't just sit back and relax for the next three years because people—our competitors—will catch up. The challenge is to go up to the next level before they do. The only way we can do this successfully is by having strong relationships with our customers and suppliers and by having the right people on board."

"I am really passionate about this industry and I really want to make a difference."
- Dr Walter Rohregger

people in the fast-growing Chinese and Indian markets, since this is where a lot of its customers are coming from. Wittur is also analysing its current resources in Europe, South America, and Eurasia where the growth is more moderate but still developing well.

The second point is technology. "We make sure that we are ahead of others," Walter states. "We are able to do this by consistently developing new and innovative ideas and concepts. We have a clear strategy and a very advanced understanding of upcoming regulator norms. Having the products ready on time is really crucial, too. At the same time, we are working on new possibilities, such as new materials, which is really important for me. Here we are working closely together with universities, which allows us to understand new trends with regard to materials. Research and development is therefore a very strong focus of ours."

The third element is the continuous improvement culture or

the aforementioned Wittur Production System (WPS). According to Walter, this starts with the employees and extends all the way to the supply chain. "To expand our culture from our organisation to the supplier base is important. Achieving a lean culture throughout the organisation is, however, the biggest challenge, as it has a significant impact on the majority of the people. We are therefore continuously working on it and I am very pleased with the progress so far."

The fourth point is developing people. "This is really a key aspect," Walter notes. "At the end of the day, I can sit here and talk to you about our success over the past few years, but the question is: why have we been successful? Frankly speaking, luck helps, but I believe that I have the best people around me and that we have established a system with which we can continuously develop our people and their performance. I call it unplugging people's talent. To have the right people is one thing and then to develop them



safety components for lift doors since 1980

