

1. Can you describe your business model to our audience?

Simply put, "think local act global" sums it up nicely. We use our employees' creativity and passion, coupled with 55 years of know-how, to bring Austrian ingenuity in wood combustion to customers across the globe. We listen, evaluate and problem solve. Polytechnik tailors a solution to the customers' needs and then follows that customer with after sales support for years to come. Constant innovation is the driver to new customers and new markets. We reinvest about 5% of our turn over every year to bring forth innovations to help us stay a relevant market player.



Polytechnik GmbH Managing Director Mag. Lukas Schirnhofner, Credit: Polytechnik GmbH

2. As you are, a family-owned company sustainability is obviously very important. How does this reflect on your business?

Well, family values are at the core of our company. Being careful with investments but also being bold enough to tackle challenges has provided a sustainable growth model to the company since 1965. At our core, we are engineers. Therefore, we measure twice before cutting. Everything we do is carefully weighed. We make sure that our solutions are well tested and proven before going to market. We carefully select our employees, however once we do, we try our best to keep them happy and around. That is why the average

tenure at our company is close to 10 years. There is a steady growth to the business and we export over 95% of our production.

3. In which CEE countries have you already developed biomass projects?

In the broader definition of CEE countries, I am proud to say that we have successfully completed projects in most if not all CEE countries. The southern regions are still undeveloped fully, but that is perhaps expected since they normally have warmer

climates. The CEE region is also key since it contains more than 30% of European forests, which are an essential natural resource our plants use in the form of residues as biomass.

4. In which CEE countries do you see the most potential for your company and why?

Romania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, and the Baltic states to name a few. The why is simple, abundance of natural resources that derive biomass, a strong industrial history and the necessity to develop.

5. What are the main challenges that you encounter in your projects in CEE countries?

The challenges vary. In general, these are subsidized fossil fuel prices, tradition of coal for power, lack of government incentives and absence of affordable financing and a higher risk of doing business.



1.000 kW Poly-H.E.L.D. - novel combustion technology (high efficiency - low dust) Credit: Polytechnik GmbH

6. Is there a current project you want to tell us more about it?

Polytechnik has been selected as the boiler technology provider for the first biomass district heating project in Serbia. It is a 2x3 MW hot water boiler plant in the town of Kladovo, which will replace the current system running on coal and heating oil. This is the largest biomass system in Serbia to date, and should have

been completed by January 2021, however – due to covid - the general contractor experienced delays of 2 months. Complete with additional emission control equipment this project is expected to create savings of around 500 000 Eur/annum for the municipality.

7. Can you share with us some lessons learned from doing projects in CEE countries?

Persistence, patience, consistency and lots of footwork. These are the takeaways so far. This market appreciates Austrian quality and has strong historical ties to Austria. Competition from low cost domestic

producers is fierce, but in the end, it is not the cheapest product that provides the greatest project lifetime cost benefit.

8. In your opinion in which areas, is there a need for further support and assistance to foster biomass activities in CEE countries?

By replicating what has worked in Austria all these years. We really have a lot to share with our neighbors, after all Austrians are leaders in biomass combustion. Also, further educating the decision makers, pushing for governmental subsidies and working with the financial institutions to make financing affordable to the industrial sector. Significant investments in biomass will not happen without support from the banking sector.

9. You also operate your own research facility. Can you give us a little insight into your current developments and focus? In which areas are you particularly interested?

R&D is very important to us. It helps us stay atop the sector. Improvements to efficiency and emission reductions are always a priority. Every percent improvement counts. Beside the conventional segment, we are always researching new ways to get the most out of biomass. Pyrolysis, gasification, and



*Installation of a 5,000 kW biomass combustion plant with hydraulic moving grate
Credit: Polytechnik GmbH*

carbonization are particularly interesting. The production of bio char is a great tool to offset climate change long term because it is in essence carbon capture. A proven, natural way of storing carbon. This is the future for us.

10. If we do the interview again in five years, where do you see your company then?

I hope that still as a market leader in biomass to energy technology. Family values and steady growth into new markets should mean that at our next interview we should have a project on every continent, which is a rarity in this business. Pyrolysis and gasification will be proven and accepted solutions alongside conventional combustion or even in front.

11. How does a day at the office usually look like for you?

A usual day in office is everything between emotional challenging and pure engineering work. I am not always the first in and but definitely the last out of the office. Since it is a family business, it is present around the clock. Therefore, the usual day in office does not really begin at the entrance but at breakfast

and it does not end when I leave the office but when I go to bed.

12. Can you describe to our readers a little bit what you do in your free time to relieve the stress of everyday work life?

The best way for me to relief stress is to have an outdoor activity that needs my full attention and takes my thoughts away from business.

For me those activities are hunting, skiing and climbing,

however another escape is provided by the familial passion for wine making. Spending time in the vineyard, making and tasting wine helps me reconnect with family history and stay firmly rooted on the ground.



View of a 2 x 10,000 kW combined heat and power plant (3,000 kWel) in Wales Credit: Polytechnik GmbH

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