

## Back on the sunny side

### Our leading companies

German businesses are frequently ranked among the best in the world - from medium-sized enterprises to corporate conglomerates, hailing from urban areas and the provinces. In this series, we will be profiling those companies deemed to be some of the most successful in their industry. Today: Meier Solar Solutions based in Bocholt, leaders in purpose-built solar module machines.

Florian von Gropper has no more worries about specialist machine manufacturer Meier Solar Solutions GmbH. According to the Managing Director, it is now recording significantly more orders once again after the end of the recently held 24th EU PVSES, a leading trade fair in the solar industry. Previously, the outlook for the company had been somewhat different, with the solar industry being held back by overcapacity. Now the company is starting to profit from the worldwide economic recovery.

Meier Solar Solutions sells purpose-built machines to solar module manufacturers. These companies need the machines to encapsulate the various components of a solar module in a protective unit. The NRW-based head office has built more than 300 of these machines since it was set up in 1999, earning it an international reputation as a market leader. There are five major suppliers in total, two of which are based in Japan and three in Europe. Mr von Gropper estimates that market growth will be between 20 and 30 per cent in the medium term. And if he has anything to do with it, Meier Solar Solutions is set for even greater profits.

However, the company has not escaped the financial crisis completely unscathed. It now employs 110 people in Bocholt and Rossla, compared to the staff of 140 before the financial crisis. Nevertheless, von Gropper is proud that no employee was made redundant on operational grounds. The key to the company's future success is investment into research & development. One chemist and two technical engineers are currently employed in this area.

Any success enjoyed by the company will benefit von Gropper directly, as the managing director owns four per cent of its shares. 20 per cent belong to the company's founder, Meier, and Hamburg-based financial investor Grainville Baird has owned 76 per cent since the summer of 2008. The company has also drawn up some very specific targets. By 2012, the company should have doubled its volume of sales to 90 million euros. Von Gropper concedes that there was a certain uneasiness among staff when the new investor came on board, "But things have quietened down again in the meantime." Von Gropper will not reveal any information about the interim results – all he will say is this: the company will finish the year with a positive return prior to tax and interest. dom

Purpose-built machine for manufacturing solar modules. Photo: oh

