

Interview with Bernhard Wiedemann,  
CEO of Bihl+Wiedemann GmbH

# „Diagnostics has been and remains our great strength“

Even though most recently innovations in the area of safety technology have been in the limelight, parallel to this has been optimizing of the standard bestsellers such as the AS-i Master and Gateways together with their unique diagnostics features that is running at full speed at Bihl+Wiedemann. In principle, notes Bernhard Wiedemann in this conversation with AS-i MASTER NEWS, everything in automation is connected.

**AS-i MASTER NEWS:** Mr. Wiedemann, you recently created a sensation with all the new developments in safety technology. Now you are suddenly presenting again a variety of highlights for the standard area of automation. Isn't it risky for a specialist like Bihl+Wiedemann to have so many irons in the fire?

**BERNHARD WIEDEMANN:** In my view this is not at all a matter of too many irons. In everything we do we pursue a very specific goal, which is promoting greater efficiency in automation technology. For the user it makes absolutely no difference whether our innovations support him in the safety or non-safety area. The important thing is that he sees a profit. This is exactly what we see as the clear development mandate from the market: timely recognition and implementation of optimizing potential, regardless of where it happens to be. This brings us and our customers further ahead than does compartmental thinking.

**AS-i MASTER NEWS:** What you describe as compartmental thinking is what marketing textbooks refer to as positioning. According to this theory a medium-sized company should define its special niche as clearly as possible. Yet you have been experiencing almost greater success than ever

with your universal approach. How did you know that this holistic concept would fly?

**BERNHARD WIEDEMANN:** I wish I could say we knew that in advance, but of course we didn't – but we were hopefully confident. Especially because the rapid growth of our company was from the very beginning never the result of theoretical but rather practical strategies. We have never positioned our products, rather we position ourselves: we are the ones who look our customers in the eye on a daily basis in their industrial production facilities. We are the ones who listen carefully when problems arise – and afterwards devote a lot of thought to which technological means are available to solve them. The bottom line is that in such a complex field as automation, everything is connected. All of our innovations have been created out of this awareness: not in the ivory tower of disconnected development engineers, but rather with our finger on the pulse of the market.

**AS-i MASTER NEWS:** And this finger telegraphed that the market is demanding optimization of your bestsellers in the standard range?

**BERNHARD WIEDEMANN:** The fact is of course that for example

our AS-i Masters and Gateways have for years been at least one idea ahead of our competitors' devices – with functions like duplicate address recognition, the earth fault monitor or the EMC monitor, just to name a few. Also our Gateways, which can handle two AS-i circuits while needing just one power supply, still remain rather unique in their conception. But you don't keep this lead by resting on your laurels until the marketplace eventually demands an update. Our seismographs are fortunately more sensitive than that. The developer teams at Bihl+Wiedemann are essentially always informed about all the key content of the dialog between outside sales and customers. Based on this information many possibilities for optimization are always being discussed, with many ideas tried out – and the most promising approaches are then implemented. Of course not every development is as spectacular as our recently introduced Safety Basis Monitor for small applications with a low safety signal count, or like the future-looking option of programming our newest Gateway generation in C. But even small improvements add up to make an efficient system more efficient.



**AS-i MASTER NEWS:** Such as?

**BERNHARD WIEDEMANN:** I'm thinking for example of the new Ethernet diagnostics interface with web server for our current PROFIBUS AS-i Gateways. Another highlight would be the new earth fault monitor that allows the service technician to detect whether an earth fault has occurred directly on AS-i or on a sensor line. Diagnostics has been and remains in any case one of our outstanding strengths. We are also continuing to develop our specialties like the "1 Gateway and 1 power supply for 2 AS-i circuits." Now the devices display both the maximum current and the current actually present in the respective AS-i circuit. Heavy consumers or a strong overload in an AS-i circuit are then easy to detect. Plus you can set the maximum current in the AS-i circuit on these devices. This ensures line protection even when using large 24V power supplies.

**AS-i MASTER NEWS:** But you don't seem to call much attention to all these innovations in your communications. Why not?

**BERNHARD WIEDEMANN:** May I correct you? And perhaps this correction is itself the answer to your question: we tend to be careful about throwing the term "innovation" around. For us these last few new things I mentioned fall under the heading "ongoing development of our flagships." As we understand it this is nothing more than improvements which our customers have every right to expect of us.

**AS-i MASTER NEWS:** I would think only a company that has enough true innovations in the pipeline can afford to split hairs like that

**BERNHARD WIEDEMANN:** You may be right about that.

**AS-i MASTER NEWS:** Mr. Wiedemann, thank you for this interview.