



Teamwork key to productivity

Installing the right robots has kept Hermeta, a major supplier of aluminum products, at the top of its game.

Text: Nick Chambers **Photo:** SiteSing Interactive

It is likely that you have seen or used a Hermeta product at some point in your life, either in a hotel, a fitness center or on a train. Hermeta delivers aluminum hardware for the building and furniture industries as well as complete furniture systems, building facades and sports fixtures. Every day, about 15,000 aluminum products leave its factory.

Over time, Hermeta has delivered one winning product after another, with the sales to prove it. The rise of low-cost labor around the world though, combined with other pressures in the aluminum hardware industry, has meant that the company has needed to embrace new solutions for its processes in order to stay competitive.

“For us, the origin of looking



into robotics was related to mass production,” says Marcel van der Sluijs, CEO of Hermeta. “We deliver up to a million parts at a time in a very competitive market.”

Nearly a decade ago, Hermeta began working with RB Techniek, a robotics integrator that specializes in foundry automation. And today Hermeta has two robots, an ABB IRB 2400 and an ABB IRB 2600, that pour molten aluminum precisely into molds.

“The robots have helped us to achieve more stable production,” van der Sluijs says. “But we also have to maintain our reputation for quality and so we cast many products by hand. Some parts are so intricate that they will always require the human touch. But robots excel at delivering some very high quality products and with a very low rate of failure.”

The use of robots has resulted in a 30 percent output improvement. In addition, with robotic help, one employee now runs two casting cells when previously, the process required one person per cell.

The company now plans to install more robots throughout the factory. But the robotic solution would not have been the success it has been without collaboration.

“The aluminum casting processes Hermeta use are very special, so we had a lot of interface with their technical specialists to come up with solutions,” says Robert Bügel, software engineer at RB Techniek.

Bügel found that one of the most difficult parts of integrating robots into the shop floor was convincing the people who were doing the manual work before that the robots would help.

“Initially the casting workers felt the casting process was too difficult for a robot,” he says. “But since the installation, the operators are very happy as they can now focus on the quality of the castings instead of the physical work. That’s a clear advantage of automation. It allows people to focus on the important things.”



“When it comes to the user-friendliness of the programming interface and the interaction of the robot operators with the software controls, ABB is the best.”

Marcel van der Sluijs, CEO of Hermeta.

Van der Sluijs adds: “We told our people that we simply wanted to produce more with the same group of employees, resulting in better processes and higher quality. When your employees feel good, everything is good. In fact, our illness rate is now decreasing. It’s almost zero. Our employees are happy, and happy people produce beautiful products.”

Bügel has worked with several major robotics manufacturers, but he favors ABB.

“ABB Robotics is the best robotics supplier in the world,” he says. “Especially in regards to their software envi-

ronment. When it comes to the user-friendliness of the programming interface and the interaction of the robot operators with the software controls, ABB is far and away the best. The reliability of ABB robots is also very high.”

Van der Sluijs adds: “ABB Robotics and RB Techniek, combined with our technical specialists, provides us with an energetic, creative and innovative team.”



Scan the QR code (right) to see ABB Robotics in collaboration with Hermeta.

Hermeta

Based in Asperen, the Netherlands, Hermeta has been in business for over 70 years. Specializing in aluminum casting, the company is a major supplier of construction and industrial aluminum products, delivering everything from building and furniture hardware (for example, hooks and coat racks) to complete wardrobe systems, lockers and building facades.

