

All the way with automation

Australian manufacturer Mett turned to robots in 1991 to improve its production of automobile parts. It hasn't looked back since.

BY GARY FABIAN

When Werner Westphal, CEO of the Westphal Group, migrated from a small town in the north of Germany to Australia in 1959, he didn't know that some 10 years later he would be establishing companies that would become important suppliers to the automotive industry.

First came Hilton Tooling in 1969, a successful precision-tool making company. Then in 1983, Mr Westphal made the decision to diversify into ma-

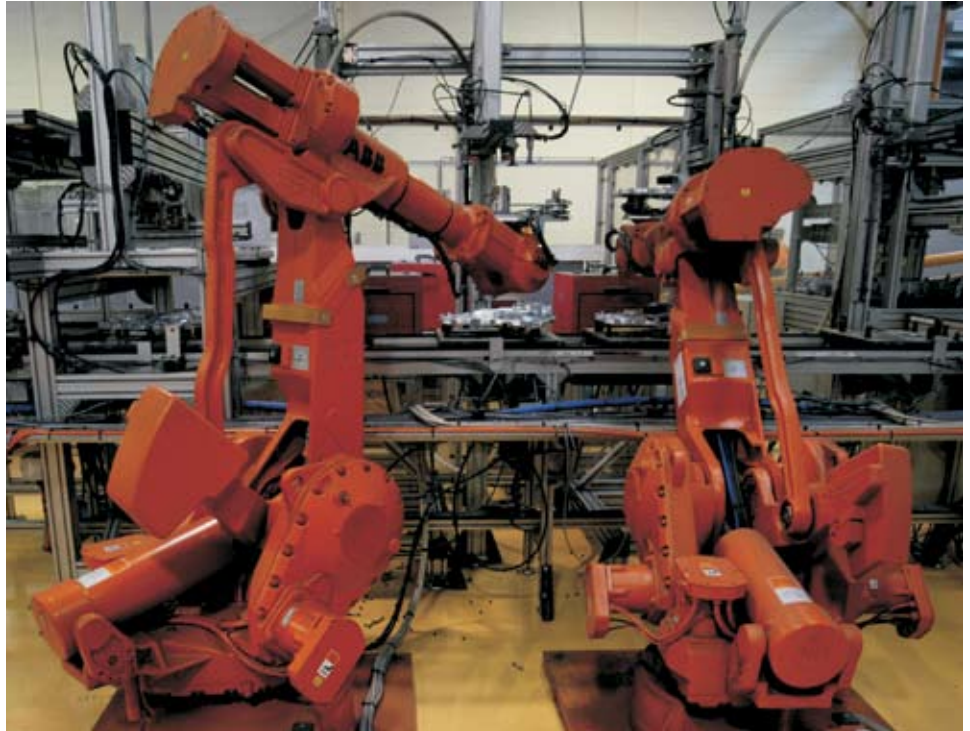
ufacturing. He had already developed a strong tool-making customer base in the heart of Melbourne's automotive industry with Hilton Tooling and had a small work force of 18 people. It was this group that, with the support of Mr Westphal's son Sven, took on the challenge of manufacturing, and so Mett Pty Ltd., a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility based in Melbourne, was founded.

Hilton Tooling's experience provided the company with engineering strength. But a new approach and a fresh way of thinking were the keys to Mett's success. "With the new company every aspect of the manufacturing process was examined," says Sven Westphal, Manager of Manufacturing Operations within the Westphal Group. "Quality is paramount, and the customer is always king when performance and delivery are to be measured," he says. With this motto, the management and staff knew it was important to "work smart, not work hard," and to use automation to its full capacity.

Investments in robots payed off

Automation played a strong part in Mett's development during the 1980s, but it was during Australia's recession in early 1991 that Mett invested in its first ABB robot cell. Mr Westphal says that Mett was so impressed with the capabilities of the ABB robotics as well as the user-friendly software, the local product support and the training offered that within 18 months it had invested in five installations and was getting a return on that investment within 12 months for most of the robots.

Today the Westphal Group and Mett have diversified into many different but complementary aspects of manufacturing. "ABB is an important strategic partner to Mett's continued success," says Mr Westphal.



Mr Westphal explains that the company originally used robots for machine tending in the foundry. Today, he says, there is no limit as to what the company tries to achieve with ABB robot automation. The list includes, in addition to machine tending, sawing, deburring, ladling, palletising, gluing, assembly work and cleaning.

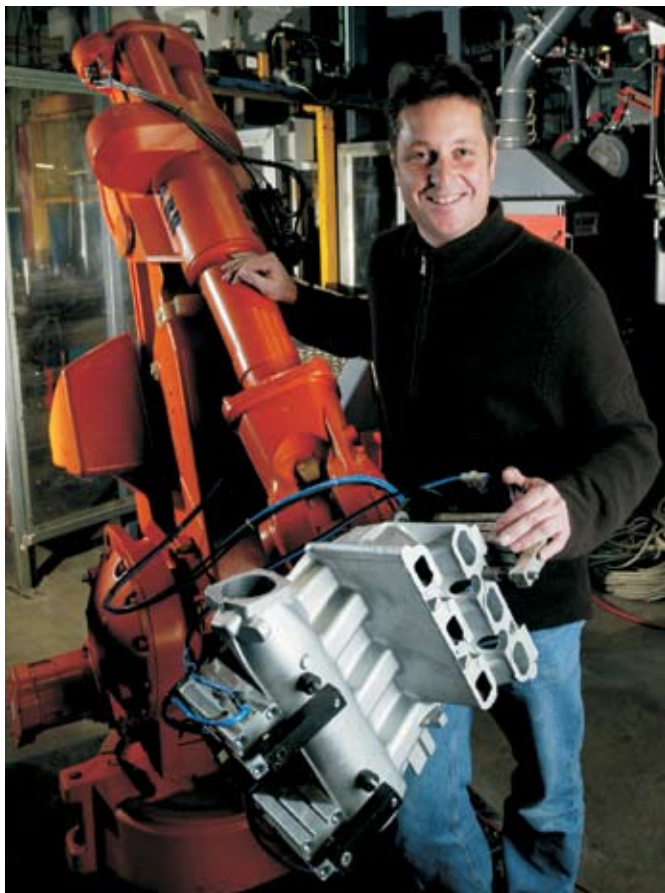
"Mett is innovative, and in many cases the company's unique approach to robotic applications has made it a pathfinder in the world of robotic-supported manufacturing," says Olivier Coquerel, ABB's Australian robot automation accounts manager.

A shift into export

World globalisation and shrinking local markets have forced Mett to shift into export markets. The company operates 24

An award winner

Mett has achieved many outstanding accolades over the years. The company has won GM's worldwide "Supplier of the Year" on four occasions. "Winning such achievements requires dedication and support from key suppliers such as ABB," says Sven Westphal, Manager of Manufacturing operations for the Westphal Group. "We are experiencing strong demand and over the past years we have been growing about 10% per year."



"The future will be challenging," says Sven Westphal, Manager of Manufacturing Operations within the Westphal Group. "But the Westphal Group's strategy of diversity in manufacturing using ABB robot automation will strengthen opportunities of growth for Mett Pty Ltd." Photos: David Callow

hours a day, selling its products to Europe, Asia, North and South America, as well as to the local industry in Australia. It produces 35,000 to 40,000 parts per day.

Mett employs approximately 300 people and has more than 50 robot installations. "We are currently working on a new assembly/machining line which will increase to a total of more than 60 systems in operation," Mr Westphal adds. "This particular new



Mett has more than 50 robots, used for everything from machine tending to sawing, deburring, ladling, palletising, gluing, assembly work and cleaning.

Why robots?

Mett has more than 50 robotic installations. These include a range of robots from ABB, including IRB 2400, IRB 4400, IRB 6400 and IRB 6600 robots.

"Having flexible automation gives us the edge in tomorrow's markets which are becoming so unpredictable," says Sven Westphal. "The use of robots guarantees repeatable and high-quality standards, and helps us to tap into a wider potential pool of employees."

line will be operational in September this year and is dedicated to large export contracts." The ABB robots used at Mett include IRB 2400s, IRB 4400s, IRB 6400s and IRB 6600s.


"The future will be challenging," says Mr Westphal. "But the Westphal Group's strategy of diversity in manufacturing using ABB robot automation will strengthen opportunities of growth for Mett Pty Ltd, in the whole market." 

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