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Sepro: ‘Open 4.0’ Approach Shapes Future through Openness, Partnership, and Innovation

At Fakuma 2017, Sepro is talking to plastics injection molders about “Open 4.0,” a company-wide commitment to delivering innovation, integration, connectivity and choice through intelligent next-generation robots and controls.

“All the talk today is about Industry 4.0 and the factory of the future,” observes Jean-Michel Renaudeau, CEO of Sepro Group. “At Sepro, we believe that achieving connectivity between systems is just one part of a much larger challenge. To us, Industry 4.0 demands that people, machines, and companies ‘connect’ in much more significant and powerful ways, ways that allow them all to perform to their highest potential.”

Renaudeau calls that philosophy ‘Open 4.0’ and says it is clearly visible in his company’s business practices and the values that stand behind them.

Open Innovation – Innovation at Sepro starts with the industry’s broadest line of robots, from the simplest sprue picker to complex 6-axis robots, all operated through a single control platform called Visual. From that unique foundation, Sepro can automate any molding machine, from any manufacturer, whether new or previously installed. Using a single control platform means not only simplicity and ease of use, but also connectivity and interoperability.

Open Integration – Sepro gives molders added flexibility by providing multiple levels of integration between its robots and the controls on many molding machines. To date, this has been accomplished this with some ten brands of IMMs worldwide.

Open Branding – Sepro partners with molding-machine makers to make more robot choices available to molders, including machine/robot packages. At the same time, it enables these press makers to go to market in new ways. “Partnerships

(More)

with other robot technology leaders, like Stäubli and Yaskawa Motoman, allows Sepro to co-develop and co-brand additional robot technology. “Remaining open about branding creates new options and opportunities for everyone.”

Open Apps – The next-generation robot controls will be more like smartphones, with functionality that lets users do more. At Fakuma, Sepro previews a control plug-in (developed in open collaboration with a key customer) that automates cycle optimization, and an app that links customers and their robots with troubleshooting assistance. Both are intended to function with the Sepro Visual control platform on new and existing robots.

Open Cooperation – Openness facilitates innovation. By proactively communicating with customers, IMM makers, other robot companies, as well as business associations and research institutions, Sepro has been able to make huge strides in product development and market expansion, while creating new options for molders and partners.

A special section of the Sepro stand at Fakuma 2017 (A1-1203) is dedicated to Open 4.0. There, visitors can get a preview of the OptiCycle and Live Support apps, which automate cycle optimization and provide assistance in troubleshooting, and experience what it's like to use the Sepro Visual control.

The results of its commitment to openness are clearly visible in Sepro's sales figures, which continue to grow worldwide. Even after four consecutive years of record-setting sales, Renaudeau anticipates yet another record in 2017, with an increase of at least 20% in global sales. To accommodate continued strong demand, Sepro is expanding robot assembly, automation, and training capabilities at its headquarters in La Roche-sur-Yon, France and also adding manufacturing capabilities in the U.S.

Fakuma 2017 also marks the first time that Sepro will be present at the show with daughter companies in all three of the countries closest to Friedrichshafen: Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Sepro Germany has been in existence for many years, but Sepro Austria-Hungary opened in May 2016 and Sepro Switzerland was launched in February 2017.

Demonstrations at the Sepro Stand

At Fakuma 2017 Sepro is highlighting its expanding product lines and demonstrating eight of its newest robots for small- to medium-sized injection-molding machines. These include two of three new small 6-axis, articulated-arm “universal” robots developed in partnership with Yaskawa-Motoman. The 6X-140 and 6X-170 on display, and a third unit, the 6X-70, are sized to serve injection-molding machines from 20 to 500 tons, and utilize Sepro's Visual 3 control system to make programming and integration easy and intuitive. These robots will be shown along with two of its Sepro Stäubli articulated-arm robots – the 6X-90L and 6X-160 – which were developed for technical applications on IMMs from 80-200 and 150-500 tons, respectively. All the 6-axis robots will be manipulating auto parts.

Open Integration can be seen in action on two molding machines operating on the Sepro stand. Sepro's recently introduced Success 5 general-purpose robot is removing optical connectors from a 50-ton Sumitomo Demag machine. Nearby, an S5 Picker – Sepro's new 3-axis-servo sprue picker is handling toy parts molded on a 50-ton Milacron press. Both applications demonstrate Open integration, in which the robot control is fully embedded in the IMM control.

The Success 5 and the S5 Picker, which features a Cartesian-beam design with 3 servo-driven axes, also are being shown together elsewhere on the stand in a demonstration of their dexterity involving molded iPhone cases.

Other Sepro Robots at Fakuma 2017

In addition to these robots at Sepro's stand, nine IMM suppliers are operating Sepro robots on their own presses, bringing to 18 the total number of Sepro robots being shown on the fairgrounds.

- Sumitomo Demag (B1-1105) is demonstrating a 3-axis servo sprue picker operating with a 50-ton IMM. A MultiInject robot will be shown on a bi-material IMM. Both are made by Sepro and branded by Sumitomo Demag.
- Billion (B3-3104) is demonstrating Level 1 integration with a BX-35 5-axis robot (Billion version of Sepro 5X-25). Robot control is mirrored on the IMM control.
- Chen Hsong (A7-7105) shows a Sepro Success 11 robot working with a 260-ton press.
- Gentis (FO-10) operates a Sepro Success 11, 3-axis robot with a LienFa injection molding press.
- Haitian (A1-1103) offers a dual demonstration, integrating a Sepro Success 11 robot with a 130-ton Mars 900 press and a 5-axis Haitian by Sepro 5X-35 robot with a 4500-ton Jupiter II press. Both employ Open integration.
- Tederic (FO-50) is operating two robot-equipped presses with Open integration: one is equipped with a 5-axis Sepro 5X-15 robot; the second with another 5-axis robot -- the 5X-25.
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About Sepro

Sepro was one of the first companies in the world to develop Cartesian beam robots for injection-molding machines, introducing its first CNC controlled "manipulator" in 1981. Today, having equipped more than 30,000 injection-molding machines, Sepro Group is one of the largest sellers of robots in the world. Its 3-, 5- and 6-axis servo robots, special-purpose units and complete automation systems, are all supported by the Visual control platform developed by Sepro especially for injection molders. This unique controller is a key component in what the company refers to as 'open integration' – a collaborative approach to equipment connectivity and interoperability between the robot and the IMM that can be tailored to exactly suit the specific needs of processors and injection-molding OEMs. For Sepro and its customers and partners, "The Future is Wide Open 4.0."