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PRESS INFORMATION

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Sepro Robot/IMM Partnerships Offer Molders New Opportunities for ‘Agile’ Robot Integration

In 2015, Sepro Group, a global leader in robotics for plastics injection molding, concluded partnership agreements with Stork IMM B.V., Hengelo, the Netherlands, and Billion SAS, Bellignat, France. That makes a total of seven different injection-molding-machine (IMM) manufacturers able to offer their customers a complete automation package that includes the molding machine and a Sepro robot. An “Agile Integration” concept, made possible by the Sepro Visual robot-control platform, today is opening up new opportunities for molders.

“Connection and sharing is a trend that is quickly taking hold in the plastics industry,” points out Jean-Michel Renaudeau, CEO of Sepro Group, which is headquartered in La Roche sur Yon, France. “That has led to increased interest in combining different equipment like injection-molding machines and robots as a way to increase flexibility. Of course, several molding-machine manufacturers have sold automation packages for years and they are quite popular, especially in countries like Germany and for global companies buying equipment for plants in other parts of the world. The buyer has just one company to deal with and one company to contact for service and support. Most molders worldwide, however, prefer to buy their IMM from one company and their robot from another and we offer them our support wherever they are or wherever they go worldwide. We also respect that there is a need for integrated packages and so Sepro is now offering these customers another choice... a choice that we call ‘agile integration’.

Already today Sepro has partnership arrangements with seven different IMM brands, accounting for 15% of Sepro sales worldwide 2015. Two of these companies supply Sepro robots as part of their IMM package. Their customers get the convenience of buying from one company but also get peace-of-mind from the fact that the robot will be serviced by Sepro, the manufacturer that knows it best. “This simplifies the decision-making process and may make it easier to get financing,” Renaudeau says. Sepro’s other five partners sell Sepro robots under the IMM brand and provide full service for the IMM and the robot.

‘AGILE INTEGRATION’

Sevro has also been able to take the “package” concept even further, thanks to the Sevro Visual control platform, which was developed by Sevro especially for injection molding. Not only is it easy to use, even for complex applications involving 5- and 6-axis robots, it also has connectivity built in, giving molders three different control-integration options.

Level 1. All robot programming is retained in the Visual control and the standard pendant user interface continues to function. However, for operator convenience, the Visual control display can be “mirrored” onto the IMM control via standard Ethernet TCP/IP VNC communications protocols. Any function that can be performed on the touch screen of the pendant can also be performed on the touchscreen of the IMM control so the operator can, at any time, access the robot control from two different locations: near the mold and IMM control area via the IMM display and also near the part unloading area using the robot pendant. This is particularly beneficial when fine-tuning robot programming on big molding machines.

Level 2. This configuration represents a middle range of control integration. It offers the same operational features and benefits as Level 1, plus the ability to use shortcut icons and keyboard functionality built into the IMM control. For instance, the operator can start up the whole production cell on one touchscreen. Other shortcut operations like ‘Reset’ and ‘Home Return’ are also available. Also, IMM set-up actions – like selecting or entering a mold or job code – automatically trigger similar actions in the robot control. When a specific user (operator) profile is entered on the IMM control, similar access is automatically granted in the robot control. Communication is via Ethernet TCP/IP.

Level 3. Here, the robot application program is fully integrated in the IMM control and all application data, including robot programming and possibly other auxiliary equipment like mold temperature controls, are filed in one place in the IMM control memory. Operation is similar to Level 2, but Level 3 files and backs up application parameters of the entire cell in one single archive. This arrangement is best for molders that want to centralize management of plant production.

Each of these configurations has been already been implemented to some degree with certain of Sevro partners.

“This is an era of sharing and connectivity,” Jean-Michel Renaudeau adds. . “There definitely is a market for robot/IMM packages and Sevro is able to offer package deals with our partners. The advantage we offer is the flexibility of choice... from stand-alone robots, to IMM and Sevro robot packages (service by Sevro), to private-labelled packages with three levels of integration with the IMM for the customer choose from.”

ABOUT SEPRO

Sevro is a global company, with in-depth engineering and manufacturing capabilities, strong technical and marketing partnerships, unmatched service and support, and a diverse product offering. Founded in 1973 and now headquartered in La Roche-sur-Yon (France), Sevro Group 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, Sepro is one of the largest independent sellers of Cartesian robots. Customers around the world are supported by wholly-owned daughter companies in Germany, Spain, Benelux, the United Kingdom, the United States, Mexico, Brazil and China. Numerous direct sales and service offices as well as independent business partners, distributors and service hubs extend Sepro’s global network to over 40 other countries. To date, Sepro has equipped more than 30,000 injection-molding machines worldwide. The company’s global turnover for 2014 was €79.2 million.

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Working in partnership with seven injection-molding-machine manufacturers, Sepro is able to offer three levels of robot/IMM integration.

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