

COMPANY MAGAZINE

**VAHLE KONKRET**



20



## VAHLE KONKRET

Dear readers,

The year 2020 has changed us in many ways. We are experiencing what it is like to live through a pandemic. And not from the history books, rather very personally in our daily lives. Before this, a weeks-long lockdown all across Germany was completely unimaginable to all of us. It was equally unimaginable how much damage the corona pandemic would inflict on the economy. The gross domestic product in Germany has suffered a historic slump and the effects are felt by everyone: small and medium-sized businesses as well as global corporations.

Of course, VAHLE, a medium-sized company with a big focus on exports, has also faced a fall in turnover this year. And unfortunately this has forced me, as Managing Director, to take a decision that is very difficult on a personal level: In order to maintain our ability to act and secure the market and to open up new markets and applications, our company had to be quickly restructured and repositioned. This step was unavoidable in order to continue to position VAHLE successfully in the market for the coming years.

An article in this edition of "VAHLE konkret" is specially dedicated to the home-office (page 12) so that you can gain an insight into how Corona has affected the working life of our colleagues at VAHLE. There was already an agreement on mobile working, but the implications of COVID 19 for working at home were until then - as for most medium-sized companies in Germany - an "exotic" idea. But now we know that it can function without any problems. In many other system relevant areas this is not possible. In order to protect system-relevant workers from Covid-19, VAHLE donated hundreds of protective masks to emergency service and hospital personnel in the region (page 15).

But I don't just want to talk about Corona. Despite adverse circumstances, we have also achieved a lot this year and implemented innovative solutions: VAHLE made contactless deliveries possible with its products long before Corona, for example in hospitals (p. 3). Our system solutions also ensure reliable energy and data transmission in the area of amusement rides (p. 10), in the food industry (p. 9) and even in one of the tallest buildings in the world (p. 11). We also continue to be a reliable supplier to the automotive industry (p. 7) and warehouse logistics (p. 8). But VAHLE would not be VAHLE if we did not keep our finger on the pulse and develop new, innovative products and solutions for our customers as an investment in their and our future (p. 6)

Last but not least, you can look forward to photos of our automatic honeycomb storage system for long goods at the Kamen production site. (p. 4) Over the past two years VAHLE invested more than 2 million euros in the complete renovation of the existing factory hall. A state-of-the-art production facility of impressive size has been created here, enabling us to react faster and even more flexibly to the requirements of our customers. Of course it has been equipped with VAHLE technology. We are all very proud of our new production line, which sets an example for the strengthening of the Kamen location, and paves the way for the future success of our company. I am entirely convinced of this. Feel free to take a look at our innovative products yourself personally, and experience our material flow. You are cordially invited.

I wish you every enjoyment reading "VAHLE konkret".

Sincerely,  
Achim Dries



## THE SAFEST DELIVERY BY FAR

### VAHLE takes care of the automatic goods transportation in the University Hospital Cologne

The best possible protection for patients and employees – that was and is the top priority for hospitals, especially during the Corona pandemic. This protection is best ensured by automating as many tasks of internal logistics as possible. The University Hospital Cologne is one of the biggest hospitals in Germany. It relies on an automatic goods transport system, and VAHLE provides the power supply for the driverless AGV vehicles from the European market leader DS AUTOMOTION.

Even well before Corona, in 2003, the University Hospital Cologne decided to use transport robots to supply its enormous 24 hectare premises with all its needs: Every day this includes around 4,500 patient meals, 30 tonnes of rubbish, sterile instruments, laundry or medicine. Per deployment, a container travels up to four kilometres, most of this distance, underground: The individual hospital buildings are connected to one another via an underground tunnel system.

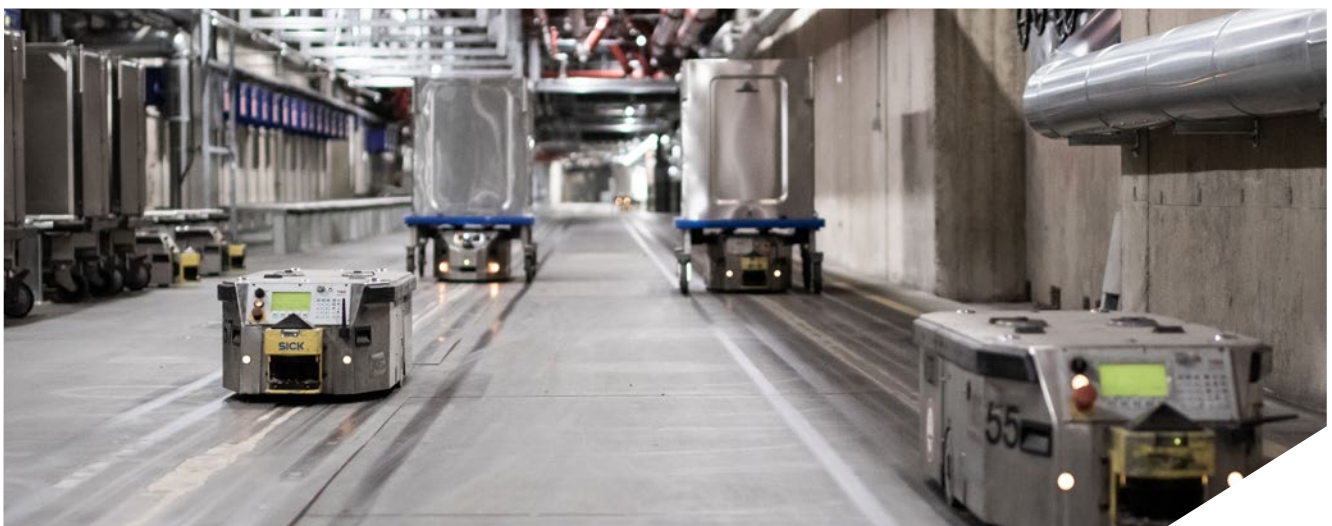
For 17 years, the driverless transport vehicles have been travelling from the wards to the recycling container, from the kitchen to the food serving area, or from the sterilisation area to the operation theatre. At regular intervals they move onto the VAHLE battery charging contacts so that they do not “run out of steam”. The transportation works like a taxi: As soon as a vehicle delivers its cargo, it takes the next container from its dispatch point and brings it to its destination. Both the current collector on the vehicle and the charging stations mounted at floor level are designed for maximum charging currents and charging cycles; at the same time, wear is minimal.

“The automatic goods transport system ensures problem-free operation 365 days a year. It is an essential system, just like blood circulation in the human body,” explains Siegfried Bultmann, Managing Director of medfacilities Betrieb GmbH. This company is responsible for operating and servicing all of the University Hospital Cologne’s technical equipment.



If the roller containers were moved by hand, you would need around 100 employees to push the containers that weigh up to 350 kilogramme – a lot of physical strain and an avoidable infection risk during a pandemic. Naturally, cleanliness and hygiene are also the top priority when transporting goods automatically. The containers are therefore cleaned and disinfected after every use.

Over the years, the transport system has been continuously expanded and adapted to the structural changes of the University Hospital Cologne. Even the robot fleet has grown by now from the original 65 units to 94. Up to 70 can be used at the same time every day. They are used around the clock and provide the wards and operation theatres with the necessary materials. Despite this enormous load, the system functions reliably and without malfunctions. The best proof for customer satisfaction: In expanding the transport fleet, the University Hospital is again collaborating with VAHLE and adding more charging systems. These can even charge UltraCaps (high-performance batteries that can store a particularly large amount of electricity) within the shortest time frames. The surgeon in the operation theatre will not have to wait for a sterile scalpel...





## LOTS OF SPACE FOR LONGER ARTICLES

The new honeycomb storage system is also a showroom for VAHLE technology

It is a project of mammoth proportions that Paul Vahle GmbH & Co. KG started two years ago: In the former halls, 9 and 10, on the company premises in Kamen, a highly modern long goods honeycomb store has been created that now forms "Production U" (because of the hall arrangement) together with the adjacent halls.

Copper, plastic, and aluminium – these are the three basic components of all conductor systems from the VAHLE production line. From now on, these components will be stored in the freshly converted hall in a gigantic honeycomb store. 330 honeycombs provide enough space for the standard material used to produce the VAHLE classics, such as U10, KSL, and KBH. The longest conductor rail that can be produced here in one piece measures a good 6.40 metres. Previously the material for these long goods lay distributed in several halls and needed to be moved with cranes and forklifts to the production site, which was a lot of effort. Now it is stored in one hall. This enables more flexible and effective work. A lot of space and technology were also needed to realise the automation of the honeycomb store for the VAHLE long goods: The hall is 70 metres long and 2,500 square metres large. It has been completely renovated and converted for the store. "Everything is new here," Henning Stelte, director operations says, pointing around him. "The foundations have been laid again and a new floor put down. For the safety of employees, different sections are marked in colour: Transport routes are darker; production areas are brighter. In addition, the complete lighting system has been upgraded, with daylight and presence-controlled LEDs, new electrics, heating, compressed air and

new hall doors, so that cranes and forklifts can directly drive through "Production U". This is another step by VAHLE towards Industrial Engineering, meaning, away from orientation on the product and towards more process-oriented thinking," says Stelte.



The centre-piece of the honeycomb store is the storage and retrieval machine from the Swiss manufacturer, fehr. A colossal piece of machinery in VAHLE blue, it is connected to SAP and can transport up to three tonnes of material at the same time. As soon as the employee selects the order in the system, the machine moves along the honeycomb at a speed of up to 120 metres per minute, and takes out the complete container with the required material.

The employees take as much as they need and send the container with the remaining material back to the honeycomb. The system registers what has been removed and reports this back to SAP. VAHLE employees join together the different components of the conductor system on several production lines. "Human work is indispensable in this area," emphasises Holger von der Heyde, parts project manager for the honeycomb store. "No robot arm can replace human skill when it comes to sensitive materials such as aluminium. As soon as it jams somewhere, an employee notices immediately and can react."



The objective of the automatic honeycomb store is to increase the effectiveness of production: Unnecessary journeys are eliminated, material does not need to be transported by forklift with great effort from A to B, rather it is brought within a short time to the processing area and installed directly. In this way, employees only need to focus on the value-adding work steps.

Last but not least, the new honeycomb store will also be a showroom for VAHLE. Almost all the products in VAHLE's system supplier portfolio are used here: The storage and retrieval device is supplied with energy via the VKS10 conductor system. Positioning is via VAHLE APOS Magnetic and data is transferred via the SMGM system. Customers can see for themselves how VAHLE products look and function when in use at the newly converted hall. Cameras are mounted on the system itself. They transmit live images of the material flow to a screen in the hall.

An additional important innovation is the extension for goods delivery. In future, lorries will be diverted directly to the hall, thus relieving traffic on the factory grounds. The material is unloaded and checked here and only approved material is stored. Empty racks are reloaded again in return. 12 to 14 storage operations per day are being carried out by now, with the emphasis on maximum efficiency: "The size of our storage honeycombs is based on the DIN norm for lorries. The volume of three honeycombs fits side-by-side on the loading surface," explains Holger von der Heyde.

The new honeycomb store was 2 years in the planning. The available space was calculated to enable the most efficient usage as possible. When the giant blue storage and retrieval device moves to the top honeycomb, there are only 8 cm left until the hall ceiling. "Even at these dimensions, every millimetre counts. There was a lot of tension in the air during the first test drive. We were about to see if the planning had worked in practice, and if everything had been calculated correctly. "The entire project team performed their tasks well.", praises Holger von der Heyde.

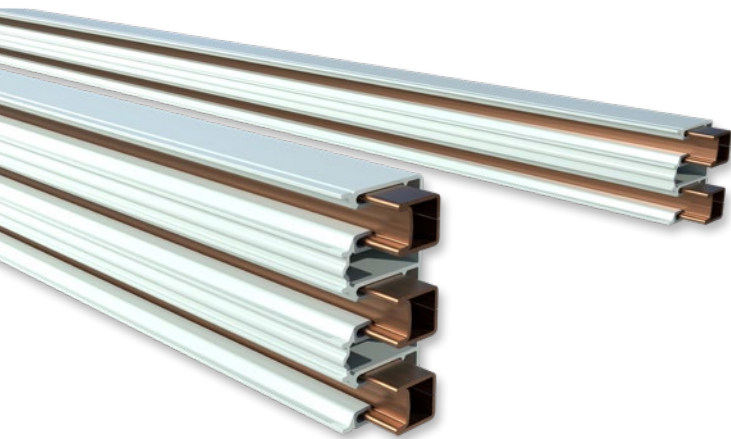




## A MODULAR SYSTEM FOR EVERY CUSTOMER REQUIREMENT

The new VCL conductor system is the universal solution for storage technology

Even before the Coronavirus, online shopping was booming. More and more different articles need to be stored in a space-saving way, and delivered quickly to the customer. Shuttle systems and automatic small parts storage are being used more frequently – with the new VCL (VAHLE COMPACT LINE) conductor system, they are reliably supplied with energy, even in the narrowest spaces.



The customer does not need any tools to mount the VCL. It clicks into the existing travel profile quickly and easily with the help of a compact hanger.

An additional advantage of the VCL: It is available in 2- and 3-pole variants. These can then be combined to create 4-, 5-, or 6-pole applications. The VCL is simply integrated into the tried and tested VAHLE VMT support profile. This allows for support distances of up to 3.5 metres (ideal, for example, for automatic pallet stores). The support profile also protects the conductor system against damage and soiling.

The conductor system is scalable and supplies the most varying applications with energy, safely and securely in the narrowest spaces (profile depths only 18 mm). An optical positioning system such as the APOS Optic from VAHLE can also be integrated trouble-free. The VCL is perfectly suited to high-speed applications, and is thus the ideal modular system everywhere that a large number of articles is handled with spatial limitations.



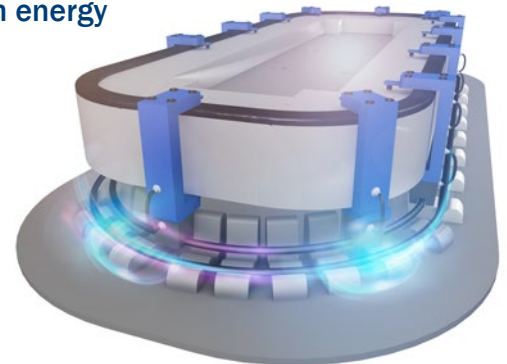
## vPOWER U015– A PICK-UP FOR ALL EVENTUALITIES

Product innovation from VAHLE supplies movers with energy

Linear driven transport systems are booming, especially in the packaging machine sector. The packaged goods are moved along the guide rails via individual “movers”. The individual movers are controlled by “wandering” magnetic fields. This means: Every individual mover has its own permanent magnet. The entire transport route has magnetic coils that can be switched individually. In this way, the movement of each individual mover, and therefore each individual product, can be controlled independently of the other products.

The advantage for the customers: Greater production performance, better process handling, shorter downtimes when equipping, smaller machines, quicker transport. Previously, one of the main challenges in the sector was to continuously supply the movers with energy. VAHLE recognised this challenge and solved it with an innovative and future-oriented product: The vPower U015 Pickup functions like a transformer: The primary winding consists of a power line that is wound around the packaging machine. It generates a permanent 45A strong, high frequency current. The secondary winding is located on the mobile pickup and absorbs the energy inductively. There is no risk of wear on the line, nor are there any open contacts that could lead to malfunctions caused by dirt or water.

The maximum performance of the new VAHLE Pickup is 150W with a voltage of 24VDC. Nonetheless, the vPOWER U015 Pickup is only 67.4 x 67.4 x 71 mm large and weighs just 650 g.



“VAHLE is the first provider to deliver a system for the inductive transmission of a such an energy volume in this small size and at this small weight,” says Marc Detweiler, Head of Product Management at Paul Vahle GmbH & Co. KG. “The contact-free energy transmission means the movers installed in the machines achieve higher speeds than are possible with conventional energy transmission systems. By now, VAHLE has integrated the system in several test installations and directly at end customers in the packaging machine sector. These customers are very satisfied. The vPOWER U015 Pickup is basically a standard solution for almost all systems with good mechanical guidance.”



## HAPPY CARS FROM THE FAR EAST

VAHLE is system provider in Geely's automotive production

If you ask around for popular car brands in this country, few people will spontaneously answer "Geely". And yet, Geely is the largest private car manufacturer in China, and by now one of the largest in the world too.

Geely can be loosely translated as "automobile that promises happiness". Its company portfolio includes, alongside its own developments, acquired brands such as Volvo, Lotus Cars, and London Taxi. As well as that, Geely holds 10 percent of Daimler AG's shares and is therefore the biggest individual shareholder.

The cars are manufactured in Ningbo, among other places, a metropolis of millions on the East China Sea. Here, the car giant Geely decided on VAHLE Automation as a system supplier for the energy and data transmission.

All the components that ensure that the individual car body parts mounted in the highly-modern production line in Ningbo, originate from one source, and that source is VAHLE.

The U10 conductor system supplies the EMS with energy. The data is transmitted via the SMGM system, by microwaves through a slotted hollow conductor. The data cannot leave the profile and therefore cannot disturb, or be disturbed by other radio systems. The individual vehicles are positioned with millimetre precision with the help of the VAHLE Systems APOS Optic: A camera reads out QR codes, thus recording the exact position. Control of the vehicles is exclusively through the DCSX series that was developed by VAHLE Automation.

Final assembly of the vehicles takes place on a skilnet system that is also supplied with energy by VAHLE. This consists of several metal frames with running surfaces and work areas with integrated lifting tables. The frames lie behind one another on a track. They are pushed from one work step to the next ("push plates"). The lifting tables lift the vehicles to the desired height.

The VAHLE systems, DCSX, SMGM and APOS Optic, are used in turn for control, data communication, and positioning the push plates. The control units have a modular design and can therefore be integrated quickly and simply into the system desired by the customer, and into the energy transmission system from VAHLE. The energy is transmitted contact-free by the vPOWER system. VAHLE is thus system provider for the energy transmission, data communication, positioning, and controller.

In 2019 alone, almost 2.2 million cars belonging to the Geely Group were sold worldwide. And because flying is even nicer, Geely is currently developing a flying car model that is due to go into serial production in just a few years. The spirit of invention and the courage to innovate – Geely and VAHLE share both these characteristics.





## WHEN THE TRACTOR HAS A SCREW LOOSE

CLAAS expands its spare parts store in Hamm



Tractors, combine harvesters, presses, field shredders – every child knows the CLAAS green agricultural machines with the red lettering. The family-owned company, CLAAS, is one of the leading manufacturers of agricultural technology in the world. And all the parts that are needed for maintenance and repair of the huge machines are stored in the CLAAS logistics centre in Hamm-Uentrop, directly at the A2 motorway.

“The customer can get everything here, from the smallest screw to the complete combine harvester engine – even for machines that are ten or more years old,” says logistics manager, Dietmar Düsing. And the number of different spare parts is increasing continuously too.



The dimensions of the new high-bay warehouse are suitably generous: 30 metres high and 110 metres long, with approx. 58,000 storage spaces for skeleton containers and pallets that are stored fully automatically by 9 storage and retrieval devices. For the power supply, CLAAS relies on proven quality “from the neighbourhood”.

Paul Vahle GmbH & Co. KG with its headquarters in Kamen (only around 30 km) installed almost a kilometre of type VKS10 conductor system into the nine aisles. The VKS10 is often installed where space is especially limited. It can, for example, be clipped into a support profile and mounted directly on the shelf stands. The system is also scalable, is very robust, and has a long lifespan. If necessary, aisles, levels and the number of storage and retrieval devices can be expanded without any problems.

“A reliable power supply is essential for automated warehouses like this one. We work in three shifts, 7 days a week. Every interruption can lead to a breakdown of the system - and downtime is expensive in this case,” emphasises Thilo Rickfelder department Projects & Processes.

An additional big advantage of VKS10: It can be optionally equipped with a positioning system and data communication. The compact conductor system is a multi-functional solution for the continuous



energy supply that VAHLE configures individually on customer request and can even be made Industry 4.0 ready. It thus fulfils the wish that CLAAS's chairwoman of the supervisory board, Catharina Claas-Mühlhäuser, formulated at the opening of the logistics centre: "We are focussing on automation and on expanding digitalization."

Also new in the CLAAS logistics centre, is a 200 metre long electric monorail system. Powered by the classic U10 conductor system from



VAHLE, 16 vehicles continuously move along the shelf aisles and convey the pallets to their respective workplaces. Through the exact positioning with APOS Optic from VAHLE, up to 640 parts can be picked per hour, double as many as previously.

CLASS invested over 20 million euros in the new high-bay warehouse in Hamm. In doing so, it committed clearly to the Westphalia region, while engaging a traditional company from the locality to provide the power: i. e. VAHLE.

Founded in 1912, VAHLE is actually only a year older than CLAAS, and is also a family-owned company.

In 2019, VAHLE commissioned its automatic small parts warehouse in Kamen. Reliable, flexible, and focussed on the future – these attributes unite both companies. Or as company founder Franz Claas jun. once put it: "We can only compete when we have the best quality available."



## THE SWEETEST ORDER THAT WE HAVE EVER GOT...

**VAHLE is system provider for the largest chocolate producer in the world**

Barry Callebaut is involved in one in every four cocoa and chocolate products consumed worldwide. Invisible to consumers for the most part, the Swiss chocolate giant produces for other manufacturers such as Nestlé, Mars or Lindt, as well as for chocolatiers and pastry makers. The company has its headquarters in Zurich and is the preferred outsourcing partner of the food industry, and the world's largest supplier of gourmet and speciality chocolate.

In the future, the sweet gold will be stored and distributed centrally in Belgium. Barry Callebaut is building a new distribution centre here, or more precisely in the small town of Lokeren in Flanders, 20 km north-east of Ghent. The building consists of a low-bay warehouse and a fully-



automatic high-bay warehouse. It is 40 metres high and has a total area of more than 60,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The new logistics location is intended to act as a hub for the worldwide sales of chocolate, while at the same time corresponding to the company's sustainability strategy: Among other things, the system is operated with solar cells and geothermal energy. It will be energy-neutral and will consist of the latest logistics technology. And here, VAHLE comes into play as a system provider: 300 meters of 7-pole U10 conductor system are integrated into the chocolate warehouse. Added to this are 21 vDRIVE vehicle controllers and 21 reading heads for the APOS Optic positioning system for the exact positioning of the vehicles. The conductor system and the code strip were installed on site by VAHLE employees. The special thing about this project: The current collectors are arranged in a very specific way – an absolute innovation, even for VAHLE. But: The customer is King, and as system provider, VAHLE supplies all necessary components from one source.

Barry Callebaut's central warehouse in Lokeren should be finished by the end of 2021. From here, sweet-tooths all around the world will be supplied with the finest chocolates, fillings, decorations and cocoa blends.



## DO YOU WANT A THRILL? VAHLE SUPPLIES THE POWER!

The company from Kamen powers amusement rides all over the world

Bigger, faster, further – this motto applies more to the amusement industry than hardly any other sector. One thing is sure: Nothing works without electricity! For this reason, VAHLE supplies the energy for the ultimate kick to the biggest amusement parks in the world: Whether it be per conductor system for the continuous electrification, or via charging contacts when the gondolas are free moving. Depending on the customer's individual wishes, our data and positioning systems can also be used.

### May the force be with you

At the end of August 2019, a top attraction opened in the Star Wars theme park at Disney's Hollywood Studios in Orlando, Florida: "Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance." Up to 8 passengers take their seats in a "Star Destroyer", a pod without rails that can move unpredictably in all directions – like on a wild chase through space. The pods move through gigantic backdrops. Moving figures, holograms, and special effects make the experience even more authentic. In addition, sequences can



be seen on screens that are specially played by the Star Wars actors. The high-performance batteries that power this frantic journey through space are re-charged in seconds via charging contacts on the ground as the thrill-seekers are getting on and off. According to Bob Chapek, Managing Director of the Disney Theme Park, "Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance" is one of the most advanced, action-packed, and in terms of time, longest attractions, that Disney has ever created.

### Racing through the Milky Way

A new roller-coaster in Copenhagen's Tivoli Gardens also transports visitors into space – just with fewer bad guys. Maelkevejen ("Milky Way" in English) is a family-friendly powered-coaster that was officially opened on St. Nicholas Day 2019, just in time for the Christmas market in the second oldest amusement park in the world. The roller-coaster is driven continuously via a U30 conductor system on the track, and can reach a top speed of 36 kilometres per hour. The track is 312 metres long, and a trip through distant galaxies takes just over two minutes. On the site where Maelkevejen now hurtles along, the family roller-coaster "Odin Express" stood for 30 years. As with the Maelkevejen, it was made by Mack Rides. The family company from Baden is one of the market leaders in the development and production of amusement park attractions, and many of its rides really only start to roll with VAHLE products. Thanks to technical progress, the new roller-coaster in Tivoli travels more quietly over the tracks than its predecessor, in two senses of the word: The modern conductor systems permit a smoother transition between the individual segments, which in turn greatly reduces the noise.

### A race with Max and Moritz

Two German rascals have been getting up to mischief since the end of June 2020 in the largest amusement park in The Netherlands: Max and Moritz. The new double roller-coaster is the centrepiece of a newly designed area of the amusement park. The visitors speed above and under one another in “soap boxes”, straight through the Alps and between specially planted spruces and mountain roses. The two trains of the double roller-coaster move in opposite directions and are both equipped with their own drives, so that the speed can vary independently of the steep descents. 2,000 passengers per hour can experience the adventure, and they are spoilt for choice: The blue track is dedicated to Max, the green to Moritz. On both tracks, the U30 from VAHLE – the classic among the conductor systems for amusement rides – is again used.



The special thing is: The thrill is only partly caused by the ride itself. The passengers wear VR glasses with which they submerge into the warlike events, so that it feels completely live.

### A trip through ancient Egypt

An indoor amusement park encompassing around 22,000 square metres, distributed over ten floors. This is the Lionsgate Entertainment World on the Chinese island of Hengqin, not far from Hong Kong. The vertical theme park complex consists of attractions based on different Lionsgate films, for example, “The Hunger Games,” “Twilight” or “Gods of Egypt”. A virtual reality roller-coaster has been constructed around the film: “Gods of Egypt – Battle for Eternity”. The visitors find themselves in a battle between good and evil as they fly through ancient Egypt.

Here too, the manufacturer Mack Rides relies on its collaboration with VAHLE: “Our U30 conductor system reliably supplies the energy required on the track,” says Sergej Nickel, product manager for insulated conductor systems at VAHLE. “The solid material with the fully copper rail and the thick insulation profile has a long life, and is absolutely the right choice even for the heavy demands placed on roller-coasters with speeds of 12 metres per second.”

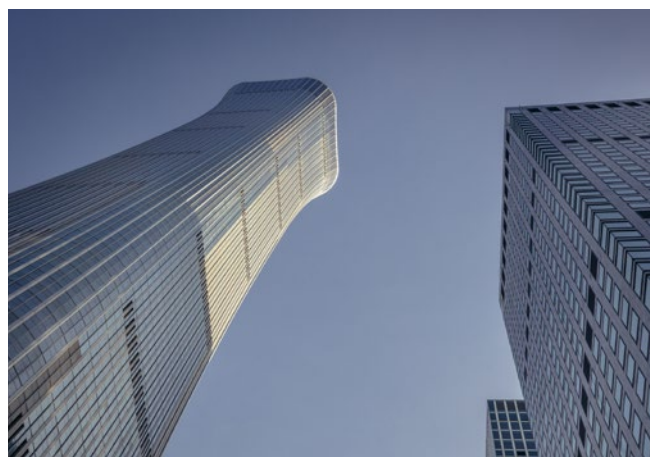


## HERE'S WHY THE LANDMARK IS CLEAN AND FREE OF STREAKS

### VAHLE powers the facade access solution of the CITIC Tower in China

528 metres high and 109 floors: The CITIC Tower is the highest building in China's capital Beijing, the fifth highest in the country, and the ninth highest in the world. As well as the headquarters of the CITIC Group and the CITIC Bank, it also houses office space, luxury apartments, and a hotel. The skyscraper impresses with its height, but its unusual form stands out too.

The tower is “tapered”. This means that it is wider at the base and top than in the centre. This design was inspired by a religious Chinese wine jar from the Bronze Age, called the “Zun”. This is why it has been nicknamed the “China Zun Tower”.



To ensure that the tower, which rises above everything in Beijing's central business district, shines beautifully into the sky, its glass and steel facade is permanently and automatically cleaned. CoxGomyl, a leading global supplier of facade access solutions, relies for this on the energy transmission system from VAHLE: The KSLT conductor system supplies power to the facade access solution reliably and safely at ambient temperatures that descend to minus 30 degrees Celsius. The system reaches a speed of up to 8 metres per second and can also be installed on a curved rail. The vCONDUCTOR is therefore the ideal solution for this application. VAHLE China, a subsidiary of the VAHLE Group, designs and supplies the complete energy transmission system.

The CITIC Tower was opened at the end of 2018, and since then the facade of this imposing building has been cleaned continuously with VAHLE Power. This gigantic, shining, flower vase will thus continue to protrude from Beijing's thick sea of buildings.



## MY OFFICE IS THE KITCHEN TABLE VAHLE DURING THE CORONA CRISIS

Employees tell about their working day during the lockdown

“Little has changed regarding the work itself,” Kevin Knauß says about his life in the home office. Telephone and computer – these have always been his main tools in domestic sales at VAHLE. He takes orders from customers in Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland by phone or e-mail, enters them into the system, and then tracks the orders. “When it became clear that we had to work from home because of Corona, I brought my own laptop into the IT department and they set it up the way I needed it,” Kevin Knauß explains. “I took with me an additional display from VAHLE, because it is certainly more comfortable with two screens. My boss, Kay Töns-Rocklage, came with a headset to my home on a bicycle. The hand-over was of course without contact,” the 23 year old laughs.

Since then Kevin Knauß has worked from home – or more precisely: From the kitchen of his small two-room flat. All week the work setup is left there, only at the weekend is the table cleared for meals.

### “UP TO NOW LITTLE HAS CHANGED”

Kevin Knauß (23) works in domestic sales

Apart from this, home office offers him a lot of advantages: He no longer has to travel 20 minutes to the office. Over the past few months, he has also got acquainted with the flats and children of his colleagues, albeit virtually. Even so, he soon realised that he misses his colleagues at VAHLE: “It can get pretty lonely being here all day. We telephone regularly, and use MS Teams, but it is not the same thing.” Since August Kevin Knauß is back in the office some days to take turns training an apprentice with his colleagues. “On the first day, it was a strange feeling, to be here again. The desks had been emptied in our office, the colleagues have the monitors at home. And the calendar was still at March 19,” he recalls. But now he likes going into the office, not least because he can sit properly at a desk again: “My kitchen chair is not so comfortable!”





## **“HEADSETS WERE THE TOILET ROLL OF THE IT”**

### **Maik Tamme (33) is an IT specialist**

From zero to more than 300 home office workplaces within three weeks: Looking back, it is almost impossible to imagine what Maik Tamme and his team from VAHLE's IT department achieved in March 2020. “On March 2, 2020, I received the first mail from Management saying that we should talk about home office,” Tamme recalls. Back then, the talk was about a handful of emergency users. This soon became 80, and today, over 300 VAHLE employees are working from home, permanently or in part. “And mostly, it worked immediately. Even we were slightly amazed,” laughs the IT expert.

The advantage for the team was that VAHLE had already planned to set up a new telephone system, albeit step by step over several months. In the end, this took three weeks, during which the five-man team made possible the seemingly impossible: A completely functioning production system including all the necessary licences was created out of the test system. Computer and telephone software was set up, either on VAHLE's laptops and PCs that were provided to the employees, or on their own devices at home. With the help of the Citrix program, a kind of virtual desktop was installed, through which company data could be accessed without any data protection problems. “I need it quickly, can you install it now?” Maik Tamme does not know how often he has heard this sentence. But as an IT specialist, he can of course check with the push of a button: From 9 March to 31 July 2020, VAHLE's IT department processed 2,327 requests (tickets) from employees – 25% more than in the previous year.

Over the first days and weeks, there were a lot of questions, but they quickly became fewer. Before Corona, Microsoft Teams was an unused icon on the screen. Today it is THE means of communication par excellence. Without exception, all VAHLE employees use it for meetings and conferences in their home office. The program is relatively self-explanatory and easy to use, there was only one problem: Everyone who wanted to telephone in their home office needed a headset – and they were hardly available even on the Internet: “Headsets were the toilet roll of the IT,” Maik Tamme says, getting to the point. A total of around 150 headsets were issued to the VAHLE employees, as were a lot of webcams and around 50 laptops. The 33 year old is convinced that this investment will pay off in the long-term. Especially since it is not yet clear when and how the employees will return from the home office to their offices in Kamen – or if at all: “Personally I find home office more

productive,” says Tamme. “Especially when you have to concentrate hard and develop concepts, it is often loud with four people in the office. Someone is always walking in. Another person is on the phone, and then somebody else has a question... I have more peace at home.” He knows though that this is not necessarily the normal state of his colleagues in the home office: “Up to now, my wife was still on parental leave and could take care of our two year old daughter. I don't really know what we will do if the creches close because of Corona when she is working again. We will probably work in two shifts.”

## **“I ALWAYS KEPT UP CONTACT WITH THE APPRENTICES”**

### **Kathrina Adelsberger (40) responsible trainer for the commercial area**



Kathrina Adelsberger is training manager at VAHLE. She takes care of commercial apprentices and usually works in the company. Here, the young people pass through all the departments relevant to them. They get to know their contact persons personally and have short distances to go if there are any questions. This changed dramatically with the Corona lockdown: All 10 commercial apprentices were sent to work in home office, as well as most of the employees from the respective departments. Personal contact and direct face-to-face discussions were no longer possible. Fast and flexible solutions were needed to ensure that training could continue to be provided as reliably as possible, without compromising quality to an unacceptable extent.

“As soon as our IT department set up the home office spaces, there were regular team meetings, also with the apprentices. I also called them personally and asked how they were doing in this special situation, or if there were any problems,” says Kathrina Adelsberger. The co-trainers in the respective departments supervised the apprentices on a daily basis, giving them tasks to work on at home. After the Easter holidays they also received the teaching material from their vocational schools by e-mail. Most of the commercial apprentices were at least happy about one thing: The interim exams were cancelled without substitute dates, and acknowledged as passed.

By now, Kathrina Adelsberger can be found more often again in her office at the VAHLE headquarters in Kamen. She is the contact partner for all questions about training. The personal contact with her “charges” can never be substituted with a webcam, she says. Then again, she was of course very happy in March when more or less overnight, her workplace was successfully relocated to her home: “I did not know MS Teams before Corona at all. Now it is just as normal to hold a video conference as to sit in the conference room,” says Adelsberger. At the start, the colleagues had a lot of fun looking into unfamiliar living rooms, and laughed when suddenly a cat ran across the screen. But this has become completely normal by now as well. It was more difficult to keep her 7 and 9 year old daughters under control during the meetings: “If mama is sitting next to you, you think you can talk to her all the time. You would think that children are actually responsible at that age. But one time they found it hilarious to tickle me from behind in the middle of a video conference. I was really annoyed.”

Still, the younger Adelsberger daughter also had to make a sacrifice at the start of the lockdown: “My husband had to spontaneously work from home too. But we only had one workplace. So I just went and stole my daughter’s desk so that I could at least sit somewhere. We also upgraded our Internet so that it would be faster. We had intended to do it anyway, and it is very nice for private use as well,” the 40 year old concedes. In the future she would like to see flexible working arrangements, sometimes at home, sometimes in the office. She prefers to see the apprentices in Kamen though: “Training takes place in the company. That was always the way and should remain so in the future for the most part.”



The interview took place in compliance with the current social distancing and hygiene rules.



## **“EVERYTHING IS RUNNING AS NORMAL. I FEEL FINE HERE.”**

**Carina Arauner (17) is a first year apprentice in Media Design**

In her year everything is different because of Corona, but Carina Arauner has got used to it by now. The Dortmund native did not receive her final school results during a ceremony in the school assembly hall, rather in the Phoenix-West drive-in cinema: “The certificate was passed in through the passenger window, together with a rose, and a glass of sparkling wine. Now and again, we beeped our hours, that was our party,” tells the 17 year old who only wanted to do one thing after school: An apprenticeship in Media Design at VAHLE. “I attended the open day at the university of applied sciences, but I did not like it so much. During career counselling, I came across Media Design as a career path. It immediately sounded interesting.” Carina was even more delighted when she got accepted for the apprenticeship. But then she became even more fearful that Corona would ruin her dream.

“When my secondary school closed mid-March, I thought at first it was all over. Nothing else will happen here,” she recalls. This fear was not entirely unjustified. Some teachers just vanished, missing learning material arrived per mail, if at all; and often there was absolutely no feedback. A friend of Carina’s had her apprenticeship in the tourist industry cancelled at short notice. The next generation was treated very differently at VAHLE however: Even before her final school exams, Carina Arauner received a call from VAHLE’s training manager, Kathrina Adelsberger, who ensured her that everything would run as planned, she did not need to worry. This meant that Carina could sit her exams in a calm state of mind. Despite the challenging circumstances, her results were outstanding as well.

Since August she has been in VAHLE’s marketing department, learning how to design and visually implement websites and catalogues using software such as InDesign and Photoshop. “My first impressions have been great. Every day I learn so much. At school we worked at the most with PowerPoint or Word. Everything here is completely new and exciting. And if I don’t understand immediately, nobody gets angry when I ask questions. My colleagues are really very nice,” Carina continues. And perhaps an end of school party will take place after all. It is planned for the end of December in the Westfalenhalle in Dortmund.



From left: Achim Dries (CEO VAHLE Group), Rainer Balkenhoff (Chief Fire Brigade Kamen) and Elke Kappen (Mayor of the City of Kamen) at the presentation of the masks.



## SPECIAL TIMES – SPECIAL DONATIONS

### VAHLE donates protective masks to system-relevant institutions

In April 2020 in the middle of the Corona lockdown in Germany, the urgently required protective masks were in short supply. The “Vestischen Kinder- und Jugendklinik” children’s hospital in Datteln was a case in point. For this reason, Paul Vahle GmbH & Co. KG, donated 500 class FFP2 face masks to the hospital during its fight against the Coronavirus.

The masks were delivered by the Chinese subsidiary VAHLE Mobilizing with headquarters in Shanghai. Prof. Dr. Claudia Roll, Head of Neonatology and Intensive Care at the “Vestischen Kinder- und Jugendklinik” was very grateful for the donation: “We are delighted with this gesture of friendship and this strong expression of international solidarity.”

A further 500 FFP2 masks went to the police and fire department in Kamen, where VAHLE, a system provider for mobile industrial applications, has its headquarters. Sonja Wundrock, head of the Bergkamen police station, was very happy about the support and sent out a squad car to pick up the masks. Achim Dries and Marc Rubeau, responsible for occupational health and safety at VAHLE, personally handed over the face masks to the fire department in the presence of Kamen’s mayor, Elke Kappen. Chief fire officer for the city, Rainer Balkenhoff, was also delighted with the support: “Unfortunately, we will run out of protective equipment resources at some stage too. For this reason, we are glad of any help that we can get.” Elke Kappen was also happy with the donation from China: “It is just really nice to experience

this solidarity.” For Achim Dries, these donations were a natural act of solidarity: “Since mid-March, the majority of our staff have been working reliably and securely in their home offices. The employees at the Kamen production location are already looked after, so it is very important to us to provide support where it is more urgently needed,” says the Managing Director of Paul Vahle GmbH & Co. KG.

The European subsidiaries of VAHLE were also equipped with class FFP2 protective masks in order to increase the safety of staff. This secures the delivery capacity too, emphasises Dries: “Our locations, particularly in the worst affected regions of Italy, Spain, and France, really need this support. We are doing our level best to help our colleagues stay healthy.”





**YOUR VISION – OUR SOLUTION**

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