

Global success thanks to Internet-based CAD library

It would hardly cross the mind of anyone driving a car how dangerous it would be if they suddenly weren't able to control their vehicle any more using the steering wheel. The steering system is one component in an automobile that must operate safely and reliably. A steering system's safety is mainly determined by the bearings it contains. One leading manufacturer of these bearings is INA, headquartered at Herzogenaurach, in the Central Franconia region of southern Germany. This conglomerate develops, manufactures and sells at around 40 sites across all the world's main industrial countries rolling and plain bearings, linear guidance systems and components for motor, transmission and chassis applications.

But the main focus at INA is not just on product sales. Customer service is also very important to the company as its components require a high degree of support in terms of information. "We want to be able to offer our customers every conceivable service for our components, allowing them to use them quickly and efficiently", explains Norbert Winkler, Director E-Businessmanager, Schaeffler Group.

"Designers nowadays basically produce their designs in electronic format. This means that the manufacturer of the machine components should provide the drawings so that the designer can import them directly into his CAD system, making it easy for him to process them further".

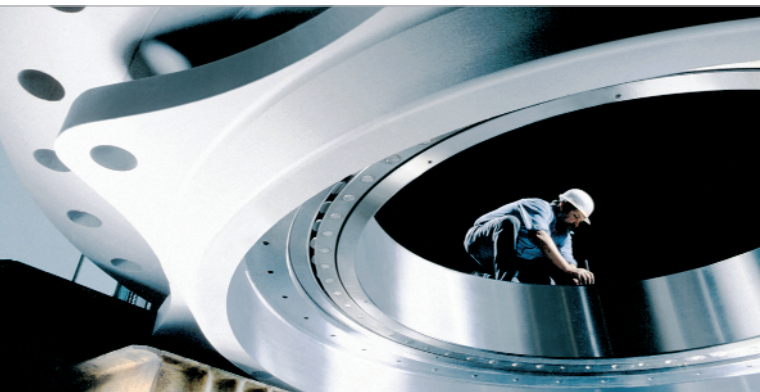
Time-consuming in-house data maintenance and 3D model programming

To be able to offer customers this service, INA already converted its 2D component drawings to electronic format a few years ago, and

made them available on the Internet. Going via the product selection and information system known as medias, customers were able to select the components they needed, produce calculations for their product and download the relevant drawing. But over time, there were increasingly more frequent demands for 3D CAD data, which led to INA programming 3D models too and supplying them for download on its website. There was a huge response to this, with between 6,000 and 7,000 requests every day.

"But the process of maintaining and converting data was very time-consuming, so we decided to outsource this task to a specialist", explains Norbert Winkler. "The idea was to supply all design-relevant information on a portal where several manufacturers were represented. This type of portal then allows customers to find the data they want easily, without any problem, without them having to go through countless CDs containing electronic product catalogs from the individual manufacturers".

As part of an extensive evaluation process, INA analyzed various offerings and carried out several benchmark tests. The solution from the supplier they initially decided on was not however very convincing in practice. "There were significant errors in some areas, not to mention the service not being satisfactory", recalls Winkler. In their quest for a competent new partner, INA then came across TraceParts, based in Amberg, Germany, offering with its powerPARTS on Web web-hosting service an easy-to-use solution for creating and publishing CAD data.



"Thanks to powerPARTS, we were able to achieve our aim of offering a global service for our products. We weren't just going to rely on potential customers stumbling across INA by chance on the Internet. But the chances are good of someone accessing INA's website via the powerPARTS portal; so, we've found the ideal distributor in TraceParts".

Norbert Winkler, Director E-Business, Schaeffler Group

Global marketing and direct insert function - key decision criteria

INA had quite specific requirements of its new provider. As a globally operating company, global marketing had an especially important role. The powerPARTS portal is available in a total of 4 languages so that INA can market its catalogs in important markets like Japan, China and the US as well. Another crucial factor in the decision was the direct2CAD direct insert function. This can be used to import component drawings directly into market-leading CAD systems such as Pro/ENGINEER, CATIA V5, SolidWorks and AutoCAD, even without downloading them and storing them temporarily on hard disk. Norbert Winkler continues: "With a lot of manufacturers, customers have to request drawings by e-mail, which, of course, takes considerable time".

The fact that TraceParts also provides its powerPARTS catalogs on CD is also a major benefit in Winkler's view, as INA does not market any CDs of its own. "We exactly wanted a partner that was not only quick and flexible, but offered additional services too, like a regularly updated CD. Another example of the great service provided is the integration of our lubricant database in powerPARTS, which went smoothly thanks to TraceParts. Other crucial factors included not least powerPARTS on Web's quick and easy use, its high level of reliability and global availability 24/7". Another noteworthy feature of TraceParts is the integration of a module allowing customers to perform important calculations before placing an order. If a designer visits the INA website via the powerPARTS portal he can automatically access a bearing calculation application, create a direct link with the selected component and then evaluate different bearing solutions in a quick, uncomplicated manner.

TraceParts - the ideal distributor

Creating 3D models was no mean task for TraceParts' programmers. In order to identify whether there is any conflict with other parts, the connections between the individual components must match 100% and the whole bearing be described in detail. The modeling process is not at all easy, especially when it comes to spherical contours and transitions to cylindrical parts. As a result, before programming started, some important questions had to be answered: what does the model look like and how is it classified?

The fact that data from the electronic catalog were already suitably prepared and could be used for modeling was a major benefit in this instance. "A model was created for each range, which is then configured as appropriate. 300 ranges in total had to be converted", says Norbert Winkler. "Thanks to the direct cooperation between INA's project managers and TraceParts' programmers, the whole process went like clockwork. What particularly impressed us was how well TraceParts handled the complicated spherical and cylindrical models".

Everyone at INA is very pleased with the results they have managed to achieve by integrating design data into powerPARTS on Web, which is also evident from the continually rising download levels.



As a globally operating company, the global marketing of its rolling and plain bearings, linear guidance systems and motor components is of fundamental importance to INA.

By integrating its 3D CAD data into TraceParts' powerPARTS portal, these data are now available worldwide. One particular service that the company can offer its customers is to allow them to import data directly into their own CAD system, making it easier for them to process these data further.

The INA Group has around 28,000 employees, with about 7,000 based at the company's headquarters in Herzogenaurach, Germany. It has 40 production sites across all the main industrial countries.

Its customer base includes high-profile companies from the automotive and supplier industries, as well as from the mechanical and systems engineering sectors. INA established an international reputation in the early 1950s with the development of the cage-guided needle roller bearing. For further information, visit: <http://www.ina.com>



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