

# CHEMICAL ATTRACTION

Having spent the majority of his student days and early working life operating in the field of chemistry, working alongside many of the biggest companies in the industry, Dr. Bernhard Hettich decided to join CHT. Although not one of the biggest players in the field, CHT has earned itself a reputation for putting people high on the agenda.

**DR. BERNHARD HETTICH** / CTO at CHT Group



The CHT Group combines a world-wide operating group of companies producing speciality chemicals. For over 65 years, they have offered innovative and high-grade chemicals, auxiliaries and additives, as well as services in numerous industrial fields and markets.

Dr. Bernhard Hettich is the current CTO of the CHT Group who, having been with the company almost 19 years, is currently the longest-serving board member. Having attended Stuttgart University, Bernhard then received his doctoral thesis in chemistry from the Max Planck Institute for Solid State Research, also based in Stuttgart, focusing on crystal structure and properties of solid matter.

Employed directly out of school, Bernhard took a job with Hoechst AG, one of the three biggest companies in the chemical business, alongside Bayer and BASF. As he explained, this turned out to be an incredible opportunity that helped open his eyes to a vast industry.

“When I joined Hoechst in 1987, a research project into high-temperature superconductors had just begun. I spent four years in the ceramic research department working on these before I switched to the more business-oriented field of polyethylene (the most popular plastic in the world). It was here I was able to gain an education in research, production as well as sales and marketing.”

**Experience**

As his experience grew, Bernhard was able to take charge of overseas interests, and headed a project in Vadodara, India, as well as spending a long period in the resin (Ink, Coatings) business, where he worked for some years as a site manager, before Hoechst was ultimately sold and is now split into many different companies. Today, Bernhard has nothing but fond memories of his first employer.

“At Hoechst, I was lucky enough to be able to work in so many areas and positions, it really was an incredible experience and education. To be honest, to this day I am disappointed the company is no longer around.”

It was in mid-2000 when, after seeing an advert in the newspaper, that Bernhard applied for the role of CHT’s managing director in the area of production, engineering and logistics and he joined that company in January 2001. But what was it that made CHT, a chemical company formed in 1953 in Tübingen, Germa-



**Research and development is integral to CHT’s success.**

ny, to service the vast textile industry, such an attractive prospect to Bernhard?

“CHT is special because it is a foundation owned company,” he explains. “The founder, Mr. Reinhold Beitlich, wanted to give the company a sustainable future, so in 1983 he set-up two foundations. One foundation is a charity that owns 90 per cent of the company shares, and part of the earnings they receive are dispersed to various charitable social projects. The other foundation may only have 10 per cent of the shares but has the supervisory mandate. They are the advisory board and support the business by putting all the profits back into the company.”

At a time when many chemical companies are desperately trying to improve their image, this set-up has proved to be a considerable

advantage for CHT, especially when it comes to working with their customers, as Bernhard explained.

“If you compare the trend of acquisitions and disinvestments in our industry, and the significant role which financial investors play, this gives us a completely different set-up. In standard companies, they constantly endure the pressure of financial investors, whereas we do not have that pressure and are fully dedicated to our customers and doing what is best for them and us.”

**Loyalty**

This set-up has ensured incredible loyalty within the global CHT team, as employees know their jobs are secure, and won’t disappear because of an acquisition. This structure was im-



**CHT Headquarters in Tübingen, Germany.**

perative to Reinhold Beitlich when he brought the organisation into a foundation, where he initially set two main targets. To always grow profitably and always maintain working places for the employees.

It is not surprising to learn that CHT has continued on an upward curve over the past few years thanks, in some part, to this framework and, also, by the management board developing and executing a strategy to slowly and efficiently grow the company.

“In 2015, we set-up our ‘Agenda 2020’ with specific targets,” explains Bernhard. “This five-year plan was created to ensure we grow to a €500 million sales volume, without acquisitions and purely by organic growth and to achieve a certain level of profitability, whilst acquiring one or two companies with a +€50 mil-

lion sales volume. We have already achieved most of these targets and are confident we will complete the scheme.”

This strong and steady growth has seen the

*“Dedication to our customers means we develop individual solutions for each customer – basically tailor-made products.”*

company more than double its sales in the past 15 years, whilst acquiring seven further sister companies into the CHT fold, to bring the total to 22. But CHT is still dwarfed by the major players, such as BASF and DowDuPont, whose annual sales are both over 60 billion USD.

Of course, remaining a smaller player in such a competitive field does have its setbacks, especially when it comes to forming strong relationships with suppliers. But, once again, CHT has turned this to their advantage, as Bernhard explained.

“We are a very small but complex company. Dedication to our customers means we develop individual solutions for each customer – basically tailor-made products. So, we have around 5000 products worldwide and with that around 3000 different raw materials. →



A close team. From left to right, CFO Axel Breitling, CEO Frank Naumann and CTO Bernhard Hettich.

Because we do not rely on a single supplier for a large part of our products, CHT is not such an 'important' customer for a big raw materials supplier. Therefore, it is more difficult for us to become close and form strong relationships with them. However, suppliers always consider us constant and reliable buyers, so the relationships are still good, but we know where we stand."

**Sustainable**

The ability to not feel intimidated by suppliers gives CHT freedom to choose. In a recent sustainability survey, conducted by CHT to ascertain how sustainable their suppliers were, the European suppliers were very open with their data, whereas other suppliers were not even interested in answering or providing any details. In these cases, CHT has sought to replace these suppliers with more suitable companies that are more in-line with their way of thinking. Bernhard is proud of this policy and commented; "This is why we recently received the sustainability award from the chemical industry association (VCI). We are not a company that just wants to greenwash - if we say we

are going to be sustainable, then that is what we will be."

CHT is forward-thinking because it can afford to be. It is a company surrounded by employees with a similar mindset, who firmly believe they are making things better for their

business and the public in general. CHT's overall aim is to be a customers' first choice for sustainable chemical solutions worldwide. They certainly seem to have all the right ingredients in place and look well on their way to achieving this perfect chemical balance. [🔗](#)

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**Dr. Torsten Pohl**  
Covestro Vice President; Head of Global Textile Coatings



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