

# CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Luckily for the Chiron Group, CFO Vanessa Hellwing isn't afraid to make big decisions to fight back against a decline in demand and the global pandemic.

**VANESSA HELLWING**  
CFO Chiron Group





The Chiron Group's offices in Tuttlingen

Franklin D. Roosevelt once said “a smooth sea never made a skilled sailor” – if this is the case, Vanessa Hellwing will emerge from the most tumultuous times in recent economic, social, and environmental history stronger than ever before.

Appointed the Chiron Group's CFO in 2018, she didn't have much time to settle in. Before the coronavirus even took hold, she was confronted with the stark reality that de-

mand was in decline as early as 2019 due to the upheaval in the automotive industry and the stuttering global economy. However, her experience has proved invaluable as she works tire-

lessly to steady the ship. It's all hands on deck.

“The tables turned very quickly after my arrival,” she says. “But I joined the company because I was attracted by the prospect of being

able to make impactful decisions that fuel success in the short and long-term. I just wasn't expecting to make so many important decisions so soon, it's been a real test.”

Vanessa has two decades of corporate experience in the bag working for the likes of Siemens, so her mettle has already been tested at the highest level. The Chiron Group has made some far-reaching moves to secure its future of late, not only in the face of decreased demand in the automotive sector, but also the aerospace industry. Vanessa, along with senior management, wasted no time in initiating a comprehensive restructuring of the business, including the bundling of production and assembly facilities (Tuttlingen and Neuhausen), focusing specifically on the service and sales of Stama products, and the sale of Scherer Feinbau, based in Alzenau.

While the Chiron Group achieved sales of around €500 million in 2018, sales in 2019 sank to €443 million (-11%). In 2020, the situation was aggravated by the pandemic, so a further decline followed. The company is therefore bracing itself for further market volatility and anticipates a significantly reduced level of workload and unsteady sales development.

“In view of these prospects, a realignment of the Group was essential,” explains Vanessa “It wasn't an easy decision but we needed to act to secure the future and lead the Group out of this crisis. The Supervisory Board and the owners support this course and our goal is to continue operating in the short term and create competitive advantages in the medium term to secure as many jobs as possible. We are doing this with a comprehensive package of measures. We have carefully examined all the alternatives and

## CHIRON GROUP

Headquartered in the German town of Tuttlingen, the company specialises in CNC vertical milling and mill-turn machining centres, as well as turnkey manufacturing solutions, and has production and development sites, sales and service subsidiaries, and sales agencies worldwide. With a workforce of 2,100 employees, the Group manufactures approximately 700 machines every year, each made to incredibly high standards in Germany, with a 66.5% export rate. Key customer sectors: automotive, mechanical engineering, medicine and precision engineering, aerospace industries, and tool production.

“ We have about 30 suppliers that are key to our business ”

## SALE OF SCHERER FEINBAU

Founded in 1978, the company has been part of the Group since 2012 and produces CNC vertical lathes and vertical shaft turning centres at its Alzenau site. The purchase was completed before the summer of 2020. The Chiron Group is now concentrating on its core competencies of milling and mill-turning.





High tech: the Group's production facilities in Germany

consider the initiated reorganization as necessary and future-proof.”

It's not all about damage limitation and crisis control; despite scaling back to combat the virus, the Chiron Group still managed to acquire Mecatis earlier this year. The company is a specialist for small, high-precision machining centres, which are used in the watchmaking, medical, jewellery, and micro engineering industry.

Both partners profit from the acquisition – Factory5 machining centres will be sold worldwide by the Chiron Group. The entire service network of the corporate group will also be available to Factory5 customers. The Chiron

“ The challenge is to keep people dedicated and motivated in times of crisis ”

## ACQUISITION OF MECATIS

Mecatis, founded in 2007, designs, builds, and maintains machining centres for the high-speed cutting of microtechnical components. The highlight of the product range under the brand “Factory5” is the Micro5, launched in 2017 – a compact and innovative machining centre with 4 or 5 axes, which customers use for the fast and precise production of different components. All Factory5 products are marketed digitally via the www.factory5.tech platform.

Group is also broadening its technology base with the acquisition. “The high-precision machining centres from Factory5 perfectly complement the Chiron product range below the o8 series. With them, we are strengthening our offer for the precision and medical technology industries. This means that we can now optimally meet the demands of many customers for compact, highly dynamic machines for small components,” explained Dr. Claus Eppler, Managing Director of R&D at the Chiron Group.

Buying Mecatis means the Group is now present with its own companies in ten countries outside of Germany. All Mecatis employees will be transferred to the future Chiron Swiss SA, and continue to care for the products of the Factory5 brand.

So what next? Well, Vanessa is still focusing on making sure the Group keeps its head above the water, and with the threat of another wave of infections looming large over the winter, planning too far into the future is difficult. “I'm just lucky enough to work with some fantastic



people – the skillset of our employees is the most valuable asset we have,” she adds. “Securing jobs is the toughest challenge I've been facing recently, so I have to keep making big decisions in the interests of everyone who works here and the company as a whole.”

“ For the last few years, Chiron and Blum-Novotest have taken on challenges together to make sure the best products are made available to Chiron's customers. Our partnership serves as a pioneer in the machine tool industry. ”

Alexander Blum,  
President of Blum-Novotest GmbH



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