

Press Release

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Engineer, Entrepreneur and Architect of a Global Corporation. On the Centenary of Friedrich Voith's Death

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Friedrich Voith is regarded as one of the leading industrial pioneers of his time. His inventions have become a benchmark in the paper industry and in turbine construction. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the death of the founder father of today's Voith GmbH.

HEIDENHEIM. Keenly innovative engineer, cosmopolitan visionary and one of Württemberg's most notable industrialists - Friedrich Voith was a man of many talents who laid the foundation stone of the worldwide Voith Group. Friday 17 May will be the 100th anniversary of the death of the Heidenheim entrepreneur. "Friedrich Voith was an outstanding technical designer who was far ahead of his time. Because Friedrich Voith decisively paved the way for the future of the company, the small workshop could develop into a corporation of international repute," this is how Dr. Hubert Lienhard, President and CEO of the Corporate Board of Management of Voith GmbH, appreciates the achievements of the company's founder father.

From tradesman's son to entrepreneur

Friedrich Voith is born in Heidenheim on July 3, 1840. His father, the master locksmith Johann Matthäus Voith, initially uses his small workshop for servicing and repairing water wheel-driven mills, especially paper mills. A few years later, Voith begins to design printing and spinning machines. With the wood grinder developed in 1859, Johann Matthäus Voith is writing technical history. His invention paves the way for modern, cost-effective paper production, and Heidenheim becomes the cradle of the paper industry.

The birth of today's Voith Group

Friedrich Voith joins his father's business in 1864 and, in 1867, takes over a flourishing company with about 30 employees. This takeover is the hour of birth of today's Voith GmbH and marks the start of a new era for the company.

The graduate engineer leads the company with great vision. He expands it with new inventions and numerous patents and develops it further by consistent internationalization. An example of this are paper machines: only since Friedrich Voith perfected his father's the wood grinding technique has it become possible to produce paper on an industrial scale and make it available as a mass product to millions of people.

Friedrich Voith is well networked and intensively communicates with other contemporary Württemberg entrepreneurs. With Gottlieb Daimler, whom he originally met at Stuttgart University, he shares not only a pronounced sense of perfectionism, innovative spirit and a passion for technology, but also enjoys a lifelong friendship.

Diversification ensures further success

From the 1870s, Voith gains another foothold and thus new markets and customers: The construction of water turbines quickly develops into a key technology for sustainable electricity generation from hydro power, and Voith becomes a world-renowned company in this industry. This makes Friedrich Voith an important pioneer of electrification.

With the construction of the first pumped storage power plant in Germany in 1908, Voith manifests its dominant position as the Württemberg powerhouse of innovation. With this project, Voith invented the key technology for the conversion of power supplies to renewable energies - and all this long before issues such as energy transition, affordable electricity or reliable storage systems dominate the public agenda of the 21st century.

Internationally active

Friedrich Voith recognizes the signs of the times at an early stage and, from 1893, relies increasingly on international markets. The company is gaining an international reputation, especially due to the export of turbines. With the delivery of 12 Francis turbines - at the time the largest water turbines ever built - to the operator of the Niagara Falls power station between 1903 and 1912, Voith participates in the then largest hydro power

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project in the world. If not before this point, this contract finally makes the name Voith worldwide synonymous with technical expertise and "made in Germany" quality.

Socially committed

Friedrich Voith is a socially responsible entrepreneur. He is one of the first factory owners to launch a health insurance and a pension system for his employees. Voith introduces the ten-hour day at his plant, builds houses for civil servants and workers and establishes a works council. With the set-up of an in-house apprenticeship workshop in 1910, Friedrich Voith lays the foundation stone for modern vocational training schemes for young people. Voith thus paves the way for meeting the company's growing demand for qualified personnel from its own ranks - at the time a truly revolutionary management approach.

In 1913 the King awards him with the Honorary Cross of the Order of the Württemberg Crown and thus bestows a life peerage on him.

After Friedrich Voith's death in May 1913, his sons Walther, Hermann and Hanns assume the management of the company and successfully continue their father's business.

Voith sets standards in the markets energy, oil & gas, paper, raw materials and transport & automotive. Founded in 1867, Voith employs more than 42,000 people, generates €5.7 billion in sales, operates in over 50 countries around the world and is today one of the biggest family-owned companies in Europe.

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