

Innovation management

Innovation in water management: Back to market leadership with new technologies

CLIENT

Ideal Standard GmbH is part of American Standard, the international leader in kitchen and bathroom fittings. Ideal Standard is one of the most modern fittings manufacturers in Europe. Founded in 1901, the company has 109 production plants in 29 countries and employs more than 60,000 people worldwide (www.idealstandard.de). The German centre for product development is based in Wittlich.

INITIAL SITUATION

Ideal Standard GmbH became the market leader years ago with the introduction of the mixer tap. Over the years, however, the company has lost its unique market position and become a mass producer. The company hoped to reclaim its place as the innovation leader by implementing a clear innovation plan. In service of this goal, Ideal's central R&D department had spent 2004 focusing on personnel in order to have a successful innovation team in place for the coming three years.

CHALLENGE

Schoen + Company was commissioned to assist with the innovation process. The Laboratory for Machine Tools and Production Engineering (WZL) at RWTH Aachen University was brought in as a technology partner. The challenge was to determine which ideas had the biggest technological and market potential, and thus help Ideal Standard to sustainably differentiate itself from the competition in the areas of water flow, temperature and pressure control.



CASE Study



The mixing tap: an innovation from Ideal's earlier days



APPROACH

Generation of ideas

The project began with the generation of potential ideas for new products and technologies. The main criteria by which these ideas were considered were their future technological viability as well as customers' current and future requirements. On the technical side, the Theory of Inventive Problem Solving (TRIZ) was applied.

Assessment of ideas

Market and technology-based assessment criteria were determined in line with the project's goals. These served as the basis for assessing the ideas with an evaluation matrix.

Selection of ideas

The ideas were prioritised based on the assessment results both from Ideal's economic perspective and from the customer's point of view.



RESULTS

The innovation agenda for 2007, called "Water management", was developed based on the selected ideas:

- The process generated a total of 16 new ideas, 6 of which were positively evaluated and pursued further. The technology based on piezo elements was identified as the most promising approach.
- A suitable development programme was designed, taking the previously analysed market and technology potential into consideration.
- Development partners for this new piezo technology were identified within the scientific and industrial community.
- The subsidiary Wabco was chosen as a partner due to its experience with piezo technology in the automotive industry.



Schoen + Company is specialised in consulting technology and service firms and has the expertise, experience, tools, concepts and methods to be your competent partner. Schoen + Company offers you innovation management services in the fields of innovation strategy, organisation, processes and controlling.

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