

HÜNI + CO expands its operational reach to Antwerp's chemical hub

HÜNI + CO, Europe's leading tank container coatings applicator, has been based in Friedrichshafen, Germany, for more than 160 years. Now it is expanding its services to the Port of Antwerp, in a new partnership with Van Moer Logistics. CEO Alexa Hüni told Felicity Landon why this is a big step forward for the family-owned company.

Alexa Hüni, CEO,
HÜNI + CO

Earlier this year, HÜNI + CO announced an exclusive partnership with Van Moer Logistics to deliver complete interior coating services for tank containers within the Port of Antwerp. Up to this point, HÜNI has focused on its home site for the application of highly functional corrosion protection coatings. Whether a tank container requiring coating or a consignment of new frying pans ready for a non-stick coating, the process has been based on products being brought to Friedrichshafen, in southern Germany, for the work to be carried out.

"The tank container (or other product) is delivered to our site and we do the surface preparation, the application of the coating, the heat cure, the quality inspection and the documentation, then send it back to the customer," says CEO Alexa Hüni. "We have carried out some special coating applications at the site of a customer if needed - for example, some 20 metre-high storage tanks already installed at a chemical site. But what we have established in Antwerp is very new."

Repairs at third-party depots

Eight years ago, HÜNI + CO launched its first tank container repair shop at a third-party depot. Now there are more than ten such depots, where the staff are trained to carry out small repairs of tank container coatings. When a tank container goes into the depot for cleaning and inspection, any minor mechanical damage discovered can be repaired. "The depots purchase the material from us and if they have any questions, we can advise on mechanical damage, chemical attack or something else," says Hüni. "This is much easier for the customer, as the tank container does not have to be transported to us. That was really the foundation - now we are working with Van Moer on a larger scale."

Van Moer already offered minor repairs to tank container coatings as a HÜNI-certified depot. In the new partnership, it will offer far more comprehensive services, at the hub of Europe's chemical and petrochemical sectors. This arrangement will be important for companies seeking a 'greener' solution, says Hüni.

Brings a value-added service

"Normally, everything has to be delivered to us but many companies want to reduce their transport costs and reduce distances, carbon dioxide emissions and time. Some of our customers suggested that we could open a new coating shop - but building a completely new factory and starting from scratch on a greenfield site and saying 'here we are, please send your tanks' is too big an investment in the first stage. No one could say they would send 200 tank containers for coating - there was no forecast from our customers' side so we decided to find an intermediate step and work with an established company that has the infrastructure and willingness to take another service into their portfolio."

The Van Moer team have been through training in Antwerp, followed by a four-week training programme at Friedrichshafen. "We want to ensure a good knowledge transfer," says Hüni. "By the end of 2023, if we get an enquiry from a customer to get a tank container coated, we will be able to offer them the opportunity here or in Antwerp. Another advantage is that, if our own capacity is fully booked, we have alternative capacity we can rely on. It's like an extension and we can give the customer the choice where they go."



Early feedback has been excellent, she notes: "Many customers said: 'Great idea, very good decision, finally!' - now we need to see if that happiness of our customers translates into orders."

Van Moer keeps stock

Under the arrangement, Van Moer will keep some coatings in stock but, as there is a limited shelf life to some materials, most will be ordered in as needed. "We supply the materials and we stay in the forefront of the contract with the end customer," says Hüni. "So for the customer, it shouldn't change very much. The customer still talks to us for checking construction, compliance issues, chemical resistance enquiries, paperwork and documentation."

Other locations?

Are many more such partnerships likely? "Basically, yes. We can copy and paste this model to other regions. A good location would be in North Rhine-Westphalia, where we have many biochemical partners. In the long-term perspective, France would be another possibility, probably in the area around Le Havre."

Company history

Although HÜNI + CO is well established as a tank container coating specialist, this activity is far removed from the company's beginnings as a leather factory and tannery in 1859.

After the devastation during the Second World War, it was Alexa Hüni's grandfather who rebuilt the business - soon figuring out that there would not be a long-term future for leather manufacturing in central Europe due to bureaucratic obligations and lack of raw materials. "He was smart and opened his mind to what else we could do," she says.

There was no direct link between leather and surface protection coating but there was a company next door manufacturing storage tanks for wine. In the 1950s, the industry had started adding sulphites to extend the shelf life of wine but the interaction with sulphite and aluminium storage tanks was affecting the taste of the wine.

"They needed to find a solution to protect the wine from the shell of the container. My grandfather did his research and found a supplier of the coating required. He listened and learned what could be done to put a protective coating into these containers." ➔

Jeddah Depot

Area: 15,000sqm
 Location: SHAMS Container Terminal, Al Moulaysaa,
 Al Khumrah Al Saif Beach Road, behind Guazain
 Roundabout, Jeddah 22623,
 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Postal Address: PO Box 1805, Al-Jubail 31951,
 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Facilities and Equipment:

- * 4 Cleaning Slots (Capacity 450 per month)
- * Inspection and Testing Area
- * Statutory Testing Repair Area with Rotator
- * Tank Heating



Services:

- * Tank cleaning and Tanker Cleaning.
- * Full repairs to frame, cladding and shell (including pitting and shell inserts)
- * Cross Loading.
- * Laden and Empty Tank Storage.
- * Steam Heating.
- * Tank Leasing.
- * Nitrogen Services.
- * On-hire / Off-hire.
- * Off-site Emergency Response

Tank Types Serviced: Certification and Membership

- * ISO Tanks
- * Road Tankers
- * ISO9001:2105
- * ITCO Member

KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA
JUBAIL - DAMMAM - JEDDAH
www.sahreej.com

SUPERLIGHT & STRONG

LAMILUX X-TREME

THE WORLD 'S LIGHTEST AND STRONGEST GRP FOR TANK CLADDINGS

LAMILUX

LAMILUX X-treme is the state of the art GRP material for tank claddings. It is a fiber reinforced composite offering the maximum possible content of reinforcement fibres in a highly elastic epoxy resin matrix. Highest strengths (twice than steel), outstanding impact tolerance and maximum weight saving can be achieved. LAMILUX X-treme has three times the strength of the best tank cladding materials available in the market.

Your benefits with LAMILUX X-treme for tank claddings

- Reduced maintenance and repair costs
- Maximised service life & less downtime
- High-class appearance even under the toughest conditions
- Reduced operating costs thanks to weight reduction



“

*Our key knowledge is the application.
Our approach is to offer function
over colour - this is not decorative*

Alexa Hüni, CEO, HÜNI + CO

”



The two businesses ran in parallel until the tannery machines were sold in the 1960s and the decision taken to focus on coatings. In 2005, HÜNI entered the tank container market. Today, the company offers a broad range of coating solutions for tank containers, storage tanks and vessels, semi-conductors and non-stick pans (amongst many other items).

“The idea is always to offer a new functionality to a mechanical surface,” says Hüni. “Our key knowledge is the application. Our approach is to offer function over colour - this is not decorative.”

The company’s 60 employees include a technical sales team and a materials scientist. Customers sometimes submit details of a tank container and the data sheet of the chemical to be transported, asking which coatings solutions are available. “We can check that with our suppliers and usually find one or two possibilities.”

Sixth generation Hüni

The sixth generation Hüni to run HÜNI + CO, she pursued a career elsewhere to gain experience before joining the company in 2016.

The family aspect is important, she says. “There are much stronger ties between management and the company. We think in longer investment cycles - we are not trying to look at five years, it is what we do in my generation and what’s going to happen in the next generation. Family ownership also makes a difference for employees - I know everybody by name and they value this. They know they are not just a number but respected as a person.”

Finding and recruiting staff is often a challenge. “After the Covid period, it became even more difficult to find people. But I think this is something that every industry is experiencing at present. As for training, even if somebody has had experience before,

if they join our company we retrain them on our coatings and application procedures and we continue to have internal training and retraining and quality checks to avoid any risk of short cuts. Safety is paramount and in fact, preparation and protection - suits, external air supply, etc., - generally takes longer than the application itself. Health and safety is a big issue.”

Growth market

Alexa Hüni is confident that demand for tank container coatings will continue to grow, particularly as there is increasing demand for the international transport of dangerous goods and aggressive chemicals. “Also, with every tank container coating now, at a point in the future it will have to be repaired. We are confident there will be a growth in tank container numbers - that’s what we see in annual reports.”

HÜNI + CO is currently reworking its strategy for the next five to ten years - “We will be in the coating business. Besides the tank container business, there is always a demand for functional surfaces. Within this period of time, hopefully we will have more automation in response to a lack of workers,” says Hüni.

The company is responding to rocketing energy costs and seeking to reduce its carbon footprint by investing in a rooftop photovoltaic system; this will generate 450KW at its peak, meeting a quarter to one-third of the company’s energy requirements, “which are sky high”.

It is a constant effort to find new suppliers of coatings and Hüni has no doubt that supply chain issues will continue to be challenging. Meanwhile, the European Union continues to tighten up regulation on chemicals. For example, a complete ban on per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) is being discussed. “This would impact materials like Teflon. These have no major role in tank containers, but who knows what could happen next? I can imagine from the regulatory side there will be challenges in the future - but I am confident that there will also be solutions.” ■