



Company Tour and Interview

Machine Production under Palm Trees

Plastics Insights visited no less than five plants during a site visit to the world's largest injection molding machine manufacturer Haitian in Ningbo. We were expecting large halls filled to the brim with machines – read this article to find out what else there was to discover and what the European Marketing Manager Dominik Wiesner told us in an exclusive interview.



To ensure that everyone feels comfortable at work, all Haitian production facilities are planted with lush greenery. © Hanser/Schröder

Founder Zhang Jingzhang's three-pillar strategy encompasses three concepts: people, cost, investment. People primarily refers to the employees. They should have a happy life in addition to their work. To promote this, there are lots of sports activities (and because the company is so big, they even built a community arena), good canteen food, company outings – and lots of greenery on the company grounds and in the production halls. This has been important from the beginning and the owner still pays attention to it during his regular visits to the factories. When it comes to costs and investments, he seems to have a good hand. The Haitian Group was founded 58 years ago, and under Zhang's leadership it has grown from a small local company into a global industrial giant with a broad portfolio.

The Founding Idea and Historical Milestones

"Sky and sea" is the English translation of Haitian. The company was founded in 1966 after Zhang spotted a gap in the market.

The many agricultural workers who cultivated rice and vegetables did not have proper footwear, which caused them great problems. The businessman decided that plastic shoes were needed. The company was founded in 1966, and the first injection molding machine was built in 1973. In 2008, the company celebrated its top position in the world in terms of sales and number of injection molding machines delivered. No reason to rest on one's laurels: today, in addition to machines for plastics processing, the portfolio also includes CNC machines for metalworking, die-casting machines, automation, auxiliaries and drive technology.

High Vertical Range of Manufacture

Haitian has always relied on a very high level of vertical integration. Milling machines were needed to build the injection molding machines, so gantry and portal milling machines are now part of the portfolio. The tie-bars and screws for the machines are braised for up to ten hours at 600 °C in a 13-meter-



deep underground nitriding furnace before they are light-hardened and wear-resistant. There is now a separate facility for the motors of the electric injection molding machines.

And all the systems needed to run an injection molding machine, such as peripherals or automation, are now “included” as well. Even the forklifts and automatic transport systems used in the smart factories are manufactured in-house.

Together with Dominik Wiesner, Marketing & Communications Europe at Haitian, we go factory hopping in Ningbo. In one day, we visit five of the six factories Haitian operates in the city. In between there is time for an interview.

Plastics Insights: *Three values are particularly important to Haitian’s founder. What are they?*

Dominik Wiesner: It’s about people, costs and investments. By people, we mean first and foremost our employees, for whom we do a lot. Costs means always keeping an eye on the costs. Whether it’s for bad times – or the third point, investments. The goal is to constantly develop and grow.

Plastics Insights: *The Haitian Group operates worldwide. We are meeting today at its headquarters in Ningbo, China. What products are manufactured there?*

Wiesner: We currently have six main divisions, and they all reflect our facilities here. These are the four machine divisions for injection molding, CNC, die casting and laser. And two supporting industries: Haitian Smart Solutions represents factory planning, peripherals and digital products, and Haitian Drive manufactures core components such as electric motors.

Plastics Insights: *How did this broad product portfolio come about?*



About the Interviewee

Dominik Wiesner is responsible for Marketing & Communications Europe at Haitian.

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Wiesner: For a long time, our core business was injection molding machines. Then we realized that such machines require a lot of vendor parts and decided to manufacture »



Ready to go: Finished machines await delivery in this hall. Haitian’s most popular machines are the Mars series, which are mainly used in the domestic market. Hanser/Schröder



If the truck at the back of the picture looks small, it is because the production hall is 200,000 m². © Hanser/Schröder



them ourselves. This led to the creation of separate divisions, which are now independent companies. These are independent, publicly traded companies that operate globally – not just for Haitian.

Plastics Insights: *Let's talk about the injection molding machines. Are they all standard machines?*

Wiesner: We have been on this path for a long time. A few years ago, we communicated that we could serve 80% of all plastics applications. In the meantime, however, we have expanded our portfolio. We also want to better serve the niches. We now believe that we have a suitable machine concept for more than 95% of the applications in the plastics industry.

Plastics Insights: *And that includes complete solutions including automation and peripherals?*

Wiesner: When we talk about our injection molding division Haitian International, for example, the injection molding machine is and will remain our core product. However, the customer often needs additional equipment to run the machine efficiently, such as an unloading robot or other auxiliary equipment. That's why we offer them as well. However, the customer does not have to buy it from us – our machines can also be operated with equipment from other suppliers.

Plastics Insights: *How do you score with your customers?*

Wiesner: With a good price/performance ratio. This applies not only to the purchase price, but also to spare parts and maintenance costs. For example, it is standard for each machine to be supplied with a tool case containing spare parts worth up to several thousand euros. As a Chinese machine manufacturer, the customer receives everything he needs from us on site and on time.

Plastics Insights: *What can you do that the competition can't?*

Wiesner: First of all, we build injection molding machines like many others. Our advantage is that we have very large resources and capacities. We have a very high vertical range of manufacture and therefore very high availability. This means that we are relatively independent and can offer stable machine prices.

Plastics Insights: *Does this also apply to the latest fifth generation of Haitian and Zhafir, which celebrated its premiere last year?*

Wiesner: The fifth generation (which, by the way, follows directly on from the third generation, the number four being unlucky in this case) includes many software and hardware upgrades and costs exactly the same as the previous generation.

Plastics Insights: *What software is included?*

Wiesner: We use AI algorithms and sensor technology to intelligently optimize production processes. The goal is to give machines the ability to recognize themselves, adapt

Info

Haitian International Facts and Figures

The Chinese injection molding machine manufacturer Haitian International employs about 7400 people worldwide. Total sales in 2023 amounted to USD 1.8 billion, up 6.2% over the previous year, with 39,000 machines delivered. 61% of customers are in the domestic market, 39% are exported. The previous peak year was 2021 with 56,000 machines delivered.

The total area of the nine production plants is 1.5 million m². Haitian has a global presence with around 60 sales and service partners. Other facilities are located in India, Vietnam, Brazil, Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, Turkey and Germany.

haitianinter.com/en

Online Picture Gallery

Exclusive insights into the Haitian Ningbo plants:

www.plasticsinsights.com/a/article-5770142



Smart factory: Finished machines move directly from the flow production area to the logistics area. The machine on the hook in the foreground is loaded onto a truck in a matter of seconds.

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themselves, decide for themselves, and reconfigure themselves.

Plastics Insights: *Who are your customers? How much is delivered to the domestic market, how much is exported?*

Wiesner: China is still the backbone of our business, about 60% of our machines are sold here. One of our bestsellers in the Chinese market is the Mars series, a servo-hydraulic toggle. To date, we have sold more than 400,000 of them – a real best-seller.

Plastics Insights: *Do Chinese customers have different requirements than European customers?*

Wiesner: Yes, definitely. Our slimmed-down, low-cost versions are particularly popular here. For example, we offer a different control system that is less expensive. To put it bluntly, we don't have to offer something like that in the medical sector in Europe. But there are other machines with high-end controls for this sector.

Plastics Insights: *Does this mean that there are different machines for different regions?*

Wiesner: Yes and no. Our main series remain the same, but there are special European packages with certain inverters, spindles, etc. to meet local market requirements.

Plastics Insights: *The German plastics industry is currently complaining about declining sales. This affects machine and material manufacturers as well as processors and toolmakers. What is the current situation?*

Wiesner: Last year we were able to increase sales by a good 6%. And since the beginning of the year, we have been pleased to see the market picking up a bit. In March, we were operating at full capacity and producing at the limits of our capabilities.

Plastics Insights: *How long does a Chinese customer have to wait for his machine if he orders today?*



Material handling, temperature control units and robots are also part of the Haitian portfolio. © Hanser/Schröder

Wiesner: It depends a bit on the machine equipment, but we currently have a delivery time of about 45 days for new machines. And we hope that the positive market development will soon reach Europe.

Lunch Break in Ningbo

It is quiet at Haitian's headquarters during our interview. The lunch break lasts an hour and a half and, as in many Chinese companies, includes a nap after lunch. The fountain in front of the main entrance splashes in the background and runs for two hours at lunchtime. This is also a wish of the company's founder, who is now over 85 years old, but is still a regular visitor to his factories. The majority of shares in the listed company are still in family hands. ■

Interview: Susanne Schröder, editor-in-chief