



// DIGITALLY BREAKING NEW GROUND //

State regulation, increasing competition, declining margins – many energy providers have to hold their ground in this tense environment. Digitization provides opportunities to meet these challenges. Thüga Energie GmbH in Singen, Germany optimized communication with its customers using digital processes and thus shaped new business models. Managing Director Dr. Markus Spitz describes the opportunities for sales in this interview.

WHERE DO YOU SEE THE GREATEST CHALLENGES IN THE ENERGY SECTOR?

MR. SPITZ / Energy provision is indeed going through a period of change. Customers switch providers more often, customer loyalty is decreasing. Thanks to online retailers like Amazon, customers are getting used to simple and guided online processes – direct communication with us as a provider is dropping. As a result, digitization and networking processes are playing an increasingly large role in the energy sector. With the new metering point operation law (Messstellenbetriebsgesetz, or MsbG), further processes are gaining momentum, such as installation of smart meters and the construction of intelligent power grids. In the Thüga Group, we are developing concepts relating to this, which we can immediately offer our customers as soon as the regulatory framework is defined.

HOW DOES THÜGA ENERGIE MEET THESE CHALLENGES?

MR. SPITZ / On the one hand, we compensate the many customers willing to switch providers with a dynamic online brand that is agile enough to digitally guide customers to an

“Energy can do more”

In 2009, Thüga Energie emerged as a result of the merger of three in-house Thüga AG operations: Gas- und E-Werk Singen, Thüga Rheinhessen-Pfalz, and Thüga Erdgas Allgäu-Oberschwaben. The 100% subsidiary of Thüga AG in Munich supplies over 100,000 households with electricity, natural gas, and heat. The company offers customers and communities comprehensive consultation for energy projects. The energy provider markets renewable energies, offers new products like photovoltaic systems with storage batteries and is involved in plants that harness wind energy. Thüga Energie operates local heat grids with highly efficient combined heat and power generation. Thüga Energie supplements the product portfolio with services for high-performance broadband telecommunication. The company employs around 90 staff members and operates regional centers in the towns of Singen, Bad Waldsee and Schifferstadt. The headquarters are in Singen.

increasing degree. We very successfully launched online sales three years ago. With a service platform that offers energy concepts, contracting, private generation of electricity with photovoltaic systems, through to individual energy consultations, we want to offer our customers true added value in addition to a cost-efficient energy supply. Moreover, we align our products more strongly with selected target groups: we offer communities special services in the fields of energy and telecommunication, for example public wifi and charging stations. The objective is to be the “all-round” provider for selected customer groups.

HOW DO THEY REACT TO DIGITIZATION?

MR. SPITZ / We have a clear strategy, and use digitization as an opportunity to take radically different routes towards customer satisfaction. Using methods from industry, we want to automate customer processes to such an extent that only very few manual operations are required, and we have already started to make progress in this regard: At the moment, the current industry standard is 15 days from the order being placed to the contract beginning. We are in the process of reducing this to less than three days.

WHERE DO YOU SEE FURTHER DIGITIZATION OPPORTUNITIES?

MR. SPITZ / Thanks to automation, we are able to generate invoices and orders that are very transparent. But first and foremost, we can also address the customers more individually. We can find out when and why a customer interrupts an order process. One year ago we were not at all concerned with these types of processes.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE ORGANIZATION? FOR INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEES?

MR. SPITZ / Just like in any organization, there are only a few people with knowledge in areas of IT, content management, or online marketing. In addition to these we use external providers for change processes that are still in progress. But we also benefit from being part of the large Thüga Group network where we can fall back on expertise. This is how we take on and successfully implement highly complex challenges. ■