



# BLICK

Issue 1/2011 | Magazine of the OBO Bettermann Group

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**Anniversary:** 100 Years of OBO Bettermann

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**Vision:** Project Future

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**Company:** Metal Competence Centre

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**2** days of pure emotion at the OBO Anniversary Gala

**40** worldwide subsidiaries belong to OBO

**100** years of enthusiasm for change

**260** tonnes of zinc fit into the basin at the OBO galvanising plant

**300** metres is the length of the new Metal Competence Centre

**2,200** people work for OBO worldwide

**25,000** tonnes of steel are processed annually in the new galvanising plant

**30,000** different products are made by OBO

**35,000** cubic metres of vapour are extracted and purified every hour at the galvanising plant

**15,000,000** metres of cable support systems are produced each year in Menden and sent throughout the world

**40,000,000** euros were invested in the new Metal Competence Centre

**Cover story: 100 Years of OBO Bettermann**

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Please send any suggestions, comments, articles or photographs to the OBO Blick editorial team, Karin Herrmann, Marketingservice International.  
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# The next century begins



*100 Years of OBO Bettermann in the new Metal Competence Centre in front of a classic car originating from the founding year, 1911: Ulrich Bettermann (left) and his son Andreas Bettermann (right) with their guests Hans-Dietrich Genscher and Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the big OBO party on 13 May 2011.*

When we “Bettermen” – which includes the whole company family and all of its employees – refer to ourselves as centenarians, then that is at least partly because we are so proud of what we have achieved.

We Bettermen identify with our company, with its achievements, and with its past successes – and of course with the opportunities that await us in the future.

We are not at all afraid of ageing. Not only are we a century old: we will one day reach two hundred.

What we are and what we will become is thanks not only to ourselves. Without our customers and employees, without our suppliers and business partners throughout industry and society, OBO Bettermann would not have become over the past century what it is today, and what we all celebrated together in May.

To live to be a hundred you have to keep abreast of the times down through the years. That is why our motto is “100 years of enthusiasm for change”. That in itself is also the best foundation for the future.

**Warm regards,  
The Bettermann Family**



## Spectacular OBO Party

**OBO lit up and all of the Bettermen shone at the spectacular hundredth company anniversary party. One thousand guests converged on Menden from sixty different countries. Customers, business partners, friends and staff celebrated at the new Metal Competence Centre. What Hans-Dietrich Genscher referred to as “the big OBO fan club” included celebrity guests from politics, industry and society, together with everybody who is anybody in the electrical installation industry.**





Genscher himself was one of two former German Foreign Ministers and Vice Chancellors to speak at the event, the other being Frank-Walter Steinmeier who is today the SPD parliamentary party leader at the German Bundestag. Both men are long-time friends of company director Ulrich Bettermann and his family. Yet there was little talk, and instead a thrilling show was staged featuring breathtaking acrobatics, stunning light and laser effects, and skilled performances by actors and musicians who took us on a journey through the first century of OBO.

OBO Bettermann is a family company through and through, as proof of which all four of Ulrich Bettermann's children came onto the stage to congratulate him. The evening was prepared and hosted by Junior Director and eldest son Andreas Bettermann, who is now the fourth generation of leadership, and who once again represented the company with confidence and wit as he led the guests through the evening – an evening which, although three hours long, was captivating throughout.



The thousand guests were given a taste of what Genscher, Steinmeier and Andreas Bettermann all articulated in unison – that 100 years of OBO Bettermann has been, above all else, the achievement of Ulrich Bettermann. It was a particularly moving day for him. Not only was the company, which he is the third generation to lead, founded 100 years ago, it was also precisely on that day, 13 May 1911, that his father Ernst Bettermann was born. Earlier that morning the family had stood at his grave at Menden cemetery to remember the first and second generations of the Bettermann line.

After the official programme, the guests moved from the Metal Competence Centre into the stunning setting of a marquee village where singer and entertainer Roberto Blanco kept the guests in the best of spirits. All of the OBO employees celebrated in the same venue on the Saturday (14 May).

Another VIP guest narrowly missed being part of the festivities. OBO's company plane had been waiting at Menden aerodrome to fly straight to Moscow, but sadly Mikhail Gorbachev was at short notice unable to attend the OBO Bettermann centenary celebrations for reasons of health.

It would almost have been a mini-summit of world statesmen in the little town of Menden in Germany's Sauerland region.

Former Soviet president Gorbachev had been a guest of OBO Bettermann at the Menden Forum in 1993, as had Genscher and former American Foreign Minister Henry Kissinger.

The Metal Competence Centre also took up operation punctually in time for the anniversary. In the midst of the global financial crisis, the family-run company made the largest single investment in its history by building the 40-million-euro-plus facility. Metal production is concentrated in the 300 by 100 metre works hall, which contains one of the world's most modern hot-galvanising plants, used to process the 15 million metres of cable support systems that are manufactured annually by OBO in Menden and sent to building sites all over the world.

Ulrich Bettermann: "OBO is in top shape on its hundredth birthday and is celebrating joyously." To mark this anniversary, OBO Bettermann published a commemorative book entitled *100 years of enthusiasm for change*, containing articles and testimonials about OBO Bettermann written by staff, customers and friends of the company, such as former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who was also unable to attend the OBO party because of a visit to the USA. Each guest received the book as a gift and lasting souvenir.



### **No staff laid off, and sales back up to the pre-crisis level**

OBO Bettermann expects a return to the turnover levels of the pre-crisis years in 2011. The company had already left the effects of the global financial crisis behind in 2010, achieving a consolidated annual turnover of almost 400 million euros. Indeed, OBO Bettermann was even able to strengthen its market position as one of the world's leading cable management companies during the recent economic troubles.

OBO employee levels remained at 2,200 throughout the years of economic crisis, more than half of which work in Germany, with 900 at the headquarters in Menden. "We're proud not to have laid off a single member of our staff during this period, which was not an easy time for us," says Ulrich Bettermann. OBO Bettermann is present worldwide with over 40 subsidiaries in more than 60 countries. As well as its German production centres in Menden and Gummersbach, the company has factories in Hungary, Switzerland, Italy and Brazil. The OBO product range encompasses 30,000 items of electrical infrastructure, including systems for connecting and securing, surge and lightning protection, cable support routes, fire protection, cable routing trunking and ducts, installation devices and underfloor installation systems.



100 Jahre OBO 100 Jahre  
WÄTTERMANN

## Impressions

All of the guests at the spectacular OBO Gala on 13 May, and of course all of those who were not able to attend, have been and remain essential companions on OBO Bettermann's journey, which was depicted in such entertaining fashion on the festive evening. However, equally essential are all of those involved in the running of the company's day-to-day business – and it is this spirit of working together that profits every one of us.
















“What 100 years  
of OBO Bettermann  
mean to me...”

**Friends from politics, industry and society congratulate  
OBO in statements marking its anniversary.**



## “Keep on the same track”

100 successful years for an exemplary German family business. Let me extend my heartfelt congratulations to the Bettermann family and all the company's employees. In doing so, I would also like to express my respect for the achievements of my friend Ulrich Bettermann. He has shaped this company and set it up in such a way as to ensure its future as a one-stop supplier of modern building installation technology. But above all I value his keen sense of social responsibility. His heart is in the right place.

**Gerhard Schröder**

Former German Chancellor, Berlin



## “A Bettermann's word's as good as his bond”

Bettermann is a ubiquitous father & son business surrounded by a management team which is as amicable as it is diligent. It is global, plying the skies in its own aircraft fleet, yet it keeps its feet firmly on the ground. You can still risk a handshake deal with the Bettermanns – a Bettermann's word's as good as his bond. In our somewhat shaky EUEW-English we might say: “OBO stands for Only Buy Obo”, since OBO stands for quality in the superlative. And so forward into the next century:

Good – Better – Bettermann.

**Christof Bonn**

President of the European Union of Electrical Wholesalers (EUEW), Brussels



## “What luck, and what a friend”

It is an honour to be able to contribute something in looking back and looking forward on the OBO Bettermann Group. My words today are full of friendship, despite being derived from four decades of commercial experience. What luck it is to have found such a friend those four decades ago. After all, after one's family it is one's friends who deserve the greatest gratitude.

**Karl Reichmuth**

Privatbankiers Reichmuth & Co, Lucerne



## “Trust in today's fast-changing world”

Now that both companies have become global players there is still a close and faithful collaboration between OBO Bettermann and Sonepar on all levels, which we are very proud of. The challenge to both management teams will be to retain and even strengthen this partnership as a trusting and successful counterbalance to today's fast-changing world.

**Marie-Christine Coisne-Roquette**

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Sonepar Group, Paris

## “Quality. Innovation. Success.”

Orange. Mittelstand. Huge range. Globalisation. Entrepreneurs. Generations. Young. Steel. Hungary. Succession. Gorbachev. Menden Forum. Aircraft. Audi. Quick. Thick old catalogues. Smart new catalogues. Courage. Foresight. Network. Chancellor. Family. Tennis. Politics. Investment. Joy. Returns. TV game shows. Quality. Innovation. Success. This list was put together spontaneously and impartially. The order is open to interpretation according to personal preference – and there’s plenty of room for that.

### **Torsten Heinje**

Chairman of the German Association of Electrical Wholesalers (VEG), Bonn



## “An aura of longevity and inherited expertise”

“Made in Germany” has always been a trademark for technical excellence, quality and reliability. German companies, especially medium-sized family companies such as OBO Bettermann, have established brands that are in demand globally and that give their products an aura of longevity and inherited expertise.

German industry will only retain its position as a supplier to the global economy for as long as there are companies such as OBO Bettermann, companies that have better products and happier customers.

### **Prof. Dr.-Ing. Hans-Jörg Bullinger**

President of the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, Munich

## “The applause is the market”

The employees at Wolfo Technics AG’s Swiss manufacturing plant and I congratulate the Bettermann family and the company on their 100th anniversary. Thank you for everything – raise the curtain and let the show begin!

### **Urs Kaspar**

Head of Wolfo Technics AG manufacturing plant, Wolfenschiessen, Switzerland



“It is impressive how OBO Bettermann opened their new Competence Centre in the middle of the biggest economic slump since 1949. Germany needs more companies like that.”



“Employees can rely on OBO, even in difficult conditions.”

“The Sauerlanders are a down-to-earth, occasionally somewhat headstrong hill-dwelling people who don’t allow anything or anybody to ruffle them.”

**Frank-Walter Steinmeier MdB,**  
Former German Minister, Chairman of the  
SPD parliamentary party, Berlin

“Extremely satisfied with  
our partner”

Essential to our many years of successful collaboration have been OBO Bettermann’s proverbial product quality, and their straightforward, professional way of responding to customer requests.

**Aloys Wobben**  
Managing Director of Enercon, Aurich





## “Credible and consistent”

Credible three-tier distribution channels; excellent, consistent, personal communication with the owners and management; loyalty from the OBO Bettermann employee organisation; combined with exceptional customer knowledge and great local presence – all this will mean a continuation of outstanding opportunities and growth potential for OBO Bettermann and Rexel.

### **Jean-Charles Pauze**

President & CEO Rexel, Paris



## “The best kind of companion you could wish for”

Ulrich Bettermann has demonstrated steadfastness and dependability like few others in his relations with the electrical trade – and especially when things have been difficult. Uli Bettermann is the best kind of companion you could wish for.

### **Walter Tschischka**

President of the Central Association of the German Electrical and Information Technology Trades (ZVEH), Frankfurt am Main



## “Values that provide stability”

The Bettermann family embodies a high aspiration for performance. They represent values that have provided stability – and always will: courage, expertise and a love of delighted customers. Their outstanding reputation in the industry helped the company acquire a large and enthusiastic clientele early on. We are glad to be among that clientele – in a place where the spoken word and mutual trust still count.

### **Oliver Schreckling**

Managing Director of IMELCO S.p.r.l., Hanover



## “At Bettermann they keep a cool head”

“Ulrich Bettermann is a dependable friend and a family man who thinks ahead of his time.”

“Anybody who says yes to Europe as OBO Bettermann does has correctly understood the lessons of history.”

### **Hans-Dietrich Genscher**

Former Federal Minister and Vice Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Bonn



## “A hundred years yet to come”

One hundred years of Bettermann: does that mean a hundred years of times past or a hundred years in the future? My personal answer, since I have only had the pleasure of working with this company for one year, is that I think of one hundred years yet to come.

### **David Garratt**

Fegime GmbH, Nuremberg



## “Partners in lightning protection”

OBO Bettermann has made an important contribution to the lightning protection industry in Germany. Thanks to the company’s enormous capacity for innovation, it has consistently developed modern products that help architects and builders in the market to construct highly effective lightning protection systems. OBO Bettermann is one of the VDB’s major patrons and has promoted and supported the association’s activities throughout many years of collaboration.

### **Reyno Thormählen**

Chairman of the Association of German Lightning Protection Companies (VDB), Cologne



## “Part of my life”

OBO Bettermann and a new China were both born in the same year, 1911. From that moment on the Chinese people began to import three great things from Germany:

1. Karl Heinrich Marx’s philosophy,
2. Beer, and last but not least:
3. OBO V20-C surge arresters.

It is amazing that two essential linkages in my life originate 100 years ago.

I know many friends who learned many experiences from that. It became a part of my life.

### **Henry Lau**

General Manager OBO Bettermann, Hong Kong

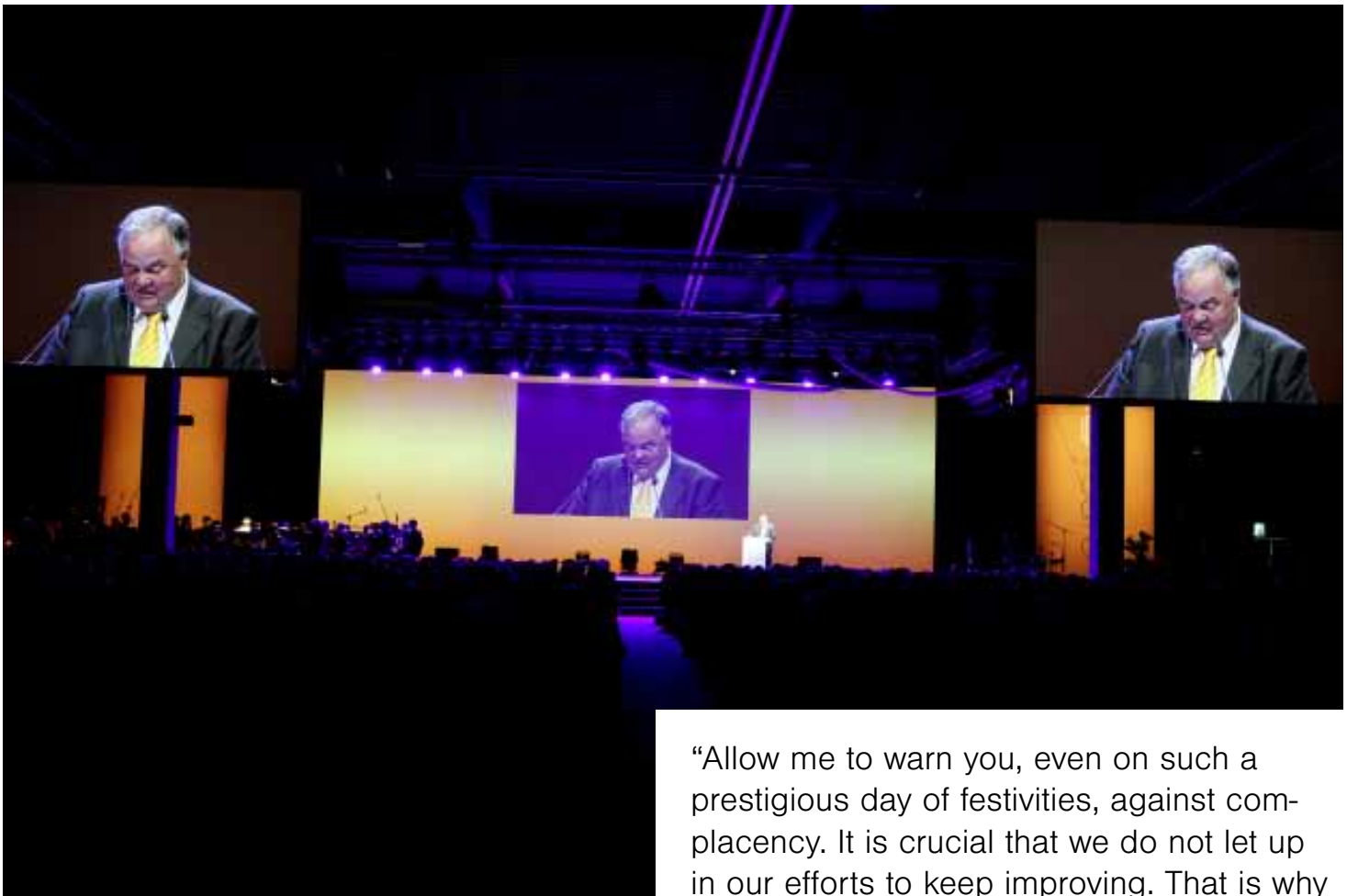


## “Full of enthusiasm”

When we opened our manufacturing facility in Hungary, we did of course encounter difficulties and challenges – which company would not have? What makes us different is that we almost always found the best way forward by working together with our parent company. Whenever our tandem began to wobble, Ulrich Bettermann and his famous “gut feeling” were there to help us. Today, we can share pride in our 600 employees and our 200,000 square metres of production facilities in Bugyi.

### **Lajos Hernádi**

Managing Director of OBO Bettermann Hungary Kft., Bugyi, near Budapest



“Allow me to warn you, even on such a prestigious day of festivities, against complacency. It is crucial that we do not let up in our efforts to keep improving. That is why we have exactly the right motto: 100 years of enthusiasm for change.”



“That which we are celebrating as 100 years of OBO Bettermann would not have been possible without family, staff, customers, business partners and friends.”

**Ulrich Bettermann**

## “Our company”

The Bettermann family’s decision to retain Menden as a location has saved many jobs in the locality, something which all of our colleagues and their families are very grateful for. We may call OBO “our” company with a clear conscience, since all of us feel at home here, and we hope that it will stay that way for many years to come.

### **Wilfried Berndt**

Chairman of the General Works Council, Menden



### “100 years old, yet still young”

I admire how successfully Ulrich Bettermann has managed to pass the company on to the next generation. I am also impressed at how they have used innovation and strategic intelligence to build up and develop the company worldwide. Their concepts are clear and forward-looking, their range of products is broad, and they are always coming up with new inventions.

**Heinrich Thyé**

Managing Director of IDEE GmbH and Director of Strategic Marketing at DEHA Elektrohandelsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG, Gerlingen



### “Always 100 per cent committed”

Many things demonstrate OBO’s 100 per cent commitment to Solar, but one illustrates it perhaps more clearly than others. Shortly before a scheduled visit to Solar Denmark, “Uli” (Ulrich Bettermann) broke his arm. This did not stop him from climbing into the pilot’s seat of his aircraft and flying to Denmark (with a co-pilot at his side of course!). His approach was simple: “If you promise to visit a customer, then you go.”

**Flemming H. Tomdrup**

Solar A/S, Kolding (Denmark)



### “Safeguarding independence and freedom”

One of OBO Bettermann’s most prudent moves has been to secure succession in the company by establishing a foundation, and thus safeguarding independence and freedom from potential shareholder disputes.

**Dr. jur. Bernd Wehberg**

Auditor, attorney, solicitor specialising in taxation law, tax consultant, Hagen



“I am very happy that my child will have such a wonderful grandfather. We all hope very much that you stay healthy and happy for us for many years to come. Thank you so much for everything you have done for us and for everybody else. We love you.”

**Bianca Bettermann**



“Dad, we always see eye to eye.”

**Christoph Bettermann**



“To you, family and company are inseparable.  
You gave us responsibility early on,  
but you never left us on our own.  
It is you we have to thank for our  
entrepreneurial spirit.”

**Thomas Bettermann**



“Don’t go home too soon, centenarians  
love to celebrate.”

“Here’s to our bicentenary.”

**Andreas Bettermann**



## Moving scenes



**One hundred years of OBO Bettermann: celebrations went on over two days. Following the Gala involving customers and speeches, there was a second day of emotional festivities when, on 14 May, OBO's employees celebrated in the new Metal Competence Centre at the headquarters in Menden.**

The General Works Council, with Wilfried Berndt at its head, had been working on a gift for months. Ulrich Bettermann and his son Andreas were profoundly moved; some even say they saw tears welling. The collective gift to them from OBO's employees was after all considerable: the 2,200 people who work for the company had compiled a book about what it means to them personally to work at OBO Bettermann, and in particular what the company anniversary means.

The main challenge facing Wilfried Berndt and his team was not collecting the contributions in time for the hundredth birthday party. "The most difficult thing was to keep the project a secret from our boss so we could make it a real surprise," says Berndt. But in the end they succeeded.



Emotional solidarity



The staff party on the second evening was full of scenes of enormous and emotional solidarity. No long speeches. Instead, a thrilling show was staged featuring breathtaking acrobatics, stunning light and laser effects, and skilled performances by actors and musicians who took us on a journey through the first century of OBO.

It was clear just how much OBO Bettermann is a family-based company. Management and staff not only celebrated alongside one another, they also mingled cordially. After the official programme was over, the Bettermann workforce moved from the Metal Competence Centre into the superbly decked-out and specially erected marquee village where singer and entertainer Roberto Blanco set the festive tone. The “Black Bomber” and OBO’s staff let loose and celebrations went on not just deep into the night, but into the early hours of the morning...





## Leading performance in service of the customers

How do you get to be 100 years old?

**Andreas Bettermann:** In the end it's all about people. My great-grandfather Franz Bettermann was a farmer who, a hundred years ago, started something completely new as a businessman. My grandfather Ernst Bettermann's generation managed to rebuild the company after the wars in the first half of the past century. And my father Ulrich Bettermann succeeded in globalising OBO Bettermann and expanding it to what it is today. Of course, none of them did it alone, they were all supported by many, many enthusiastic, loyal hands and minds.



The Metal Competence Centre was completed just in time to mark the hundredth birthday of OBO Bettermann this year. Is it your masterstroke as CEO?

**Andreas Bettermann:** In my position you have to deliver masterstrokes all the time, even if you make mistakes sometimes – not that the new Metal Competence Centre was one of those. What is crucial about it is that it gathers together production structures which were previously scattered across many sites in Menden. But even that is not the most important reason for our investment, which, by the way, was a masterstroke by the whole OBO team.

What is?

**Andreas Bettermann:** The Metal Competence Centre epitomises OBO Bettermann's objective of concentrating its expertise for the benefit of its customers and the electrical market in Germany, Europe and worldwide. OBO considers itself responsible for leading performance in production

technology, market penetration and logistics. In short, responsible for leading performance in service of its customers. The Competence Centre is also a step towards creating highly professionalised production segmentation worldwide.

At the age of 35, you are already an experienced entrepreneur at the head of a corporate group. How old were you when you entered the management of OBO Bettermann?

**Andreas Bettermann:** 25.

Pretty young?

**Andreas Bettermann:** In the beginning I didn't think so much about the responsibility as I did about my surroundings. I had an interesting job in marketing at OBO and I just got started. I enjoyed it, and as it has turned out I am now one of the people at the company who does carry responsibility, yes.



What was it that swung things your way and put you in a leadership position so early?

**Andreas Bettermann:** First and foremost, my father. But one other factor must have been that one of my mentors, our overall head of marketing, Heinz Schauerte, died unexpectedly in 2001, and somebody was needed quickly to head up a marketing team which was already working very well.

How were you prepared for your management role?

**Andreas Bettermann:** I wasn't actually, at least not in the sense of any particular formal training. I went my own way, studied economics, and worked in the USA, Switzerland and Germany. I never developed a "junior complex", and I was able to live that time to the full. I never took it for granted that I would be given a managerial position at OBO, but in the end my father made me an offer to join OBO – and demonstrated enormous faith in me, which helped me a lot to develop.

What to you is the ultimate art of leadership?

**Andreas Bettermann:** To keep both feet on the ground. My father is a good example of that. It is essential to be able to make objective and honest evaluations of different situations that require decisions. Then you check it against your gut feeling – and off you go.

How would you describe the division of work between you and your father?

**Andreas Bettermann:** Today, my father is our strategic captain, our "databank of experience", and the chairman of our advisory group. I am responsible for operative business. This is supported by our circle of consultants as well as our family foundation of which, above all, my siblings Bianca, Christoph and Thomas form a part.

Family-owned businesses often break down over the transition from one generation to the next. Why are things working out so well for you?

**Andreas Bettermann:** The factor which is ultimately decisive is the trust invested by the older generation in the younger. That means no official reprimands in front of the workforce, and a complete handing-over of the areas envisaged. I've often heard my father fibbing that he has no idea about something and that someone should come to me. White lies of course, but ones used quite intentionally to steer things



towards the younger generation.

What does OBO Bettermann stand for today?

**Andreas Bettermann:** For continuity and innovation. For decades the company has been proving that high-quality products and collaborative closeness to the trades and to electrical wholesalers are guarantees for healthy growth and sustainable earnings. One of the results of this is the constant stream of new patents which we register.

How do you see the economic situation in the year of your anniversary?

**Andreas Bettermann:** In 2011, OBO Bettermann will return to the level of turnover it had prior to the crisis. We had already moved beyond the effects of the global economic crisis in 2010, and achieved an annual turnover of almost 400 million euros. We did not sink so very deep into the crisis, and we got out of it again quickly, too.

Where does OBO intend to grow?

**Andreas Bettermann:** OBO Bettermann even managed to expand its market position as one of the world's leading cable management companies during the period of economic troubles that we have just come out of. This was highlighted again recently by our attendance at the German World Market Leader Congress in early 2011, which was all about securing leading positions by means of sustainable growth in the global market. As a national economy, Germany is dependent on the export strength of its industry. Apart from its large multinational corporations, this is upheld

by its numerous market leaders from the *Mittelstand* – small and medium-sized German companies. OBO Bettermann intends to attend regularly.

So is the German market subordinate to that?

**Andreas Bettermann:** Not at all. During the recent financial and economic crisis we saw just how important it was not to neglect the German market, where we generate around half of our turnover. The same can be said about our workforce. The number of employees at OBO remained unchanged during the crisis period. More than half of our 2,200 employees work in Germany, and around 800 of them at the headquarters in Menden.

In 2010, you were elected as the youngest chairman ever of the 160-member Installation and Equipment Systems Association at ZVEI. What motivated you to take that position?

**Andreas Bettermann:** Electrical engineering is undergoing upheavals the likes of which it has not seen for decades. There have never been such changes since electricity was harnessed. The electrical installation industry now has more opportunities than it has had for a long time. There are many attractive areas of action; electrical mobility, intelligent networks and energy efficiency are mega-trends which will have strong effects on the electrical installation market. I consider the opportunities to be excellent for German manufacturers, retailers and fitters, because of our well-established quality and safety standards.



Can you give us an example?

**Andreas Bettermann:** If you want to charge up an electric car in your garage at home, you will need a new system. Reduced energy consumption in buildings can be achieved not only by using insulation, but also by means of more intelligent control systems. The more sophisticated these systems become, the greater the demand will be for surge and lightning protection systems.

Which was the product that gave OBO Bettermann its breakthrough to the top? And which was the most unusual product?

**Andreas Bettermann:** When you have a range of 30,000 different installation products on your books, it's not so easy to say. But it was the OBO "no drilling" wall plug which gave us the first part of our name. That was in the 1950s, and since then OBO has been synonymous with user-focused, installation-friendly products.

You are now the fourth generation to manage the company. What do you consider to be your personal responsibility to the firm?

**Andreas Bettermann:** I represent continuity and responsibility to those who have endeavoured to keep us going over these hundred years. That means the family, who are the owners, and our workforce and customers. My job is to ensure that OBO Bettermann is still around in another 200 years.

That is something for which you have been recognised publically. At the end of 2010 you were awarded the Mittelstand Award. What does that kind of acknowledgement mean to you?

**Andreas Bettermann:** I am very happy about it, and I am also well aware that I have received it on behalf of the many other people who have contributed to our success.

OBO's activities are summed up by the motto "Think connected". What does that slogan mean?

**Andreas Bettermann:** It means we don't just think selectively, we think in terms of a full-circle partnership. The more we understand our customers, and the more we offer them products and solutions which allow them to succeed in the market, the more success we ourselves will achieve. "Think connected" is also a short way of describing the synthesis of different products to create a system, and from there a user-oriented solution.

Your product range has steadily grown over your 100-year company history. You no longer see yourselves as component manufacturers but as solution providers. Is that a response to what you are hearing from the market?

**Andreas Bettermann:** We do what the market expects and requires of us. But that doesn't mean we wait until it's screaming for something. We're engaged in a continuous exchange with everyone in the industry and we're very happy about that. The 50 new products that we brought to the market in 2010 are genuine new OBO products, on top of which we have also made another 300 product modifications. I know some companies who would consider that alone to be innovative.



How do you view three-tier distribution? How do you support electrical retailers and electrical tradesmen and their companies?

**Andreas Bettermann:** The best way of answering that is to quote from the Mittelstand Award certificate: “Bettermann uses every opportunity to make direct contact with the trades. As a result of this open-mindedness, the specific needs of fitters in the electrical trade are not only taken into account, they become a central component in all of the company’s business decisions. Bettermann is always responding to requests from the trade. It also strives to convey technical information to the end-customers in order to promote a demand for high-end technical solutions. This pre-marketing process is at such a high level that it serves as an example to the entire electrical industry. OBO Bettermann is an absolutely dependable partner to the electrical trade and to wholesalers, not least because of Andreas Bettermann’s outstanding commitment.” I could not have put it better myself, and certainly not more objectively.

Which regions in Germany, Europe and the world is OBO Bettermann focusing on?

**Andreas Bettermann:** We are staying focused on the markets in Germany, Europe and Asia. We have a long-term master plan which aims to make use of new opportunities in Eastern Europe, China and India. But in our home market of Germany, all of the regions are of course under the spotlight. There are the well-known urban conurbations which are set to keep developing very fast in the future.

What opportunities do you believe await OBO Bettermann as a family company?

**Andreas Bettermann:** Family-owned companies are decisive, flexible and always ready to speak to you personally. And I mean that! If a customer tells me that we have messed up somewhere, I don’t sleep well at night ...

Is the tradition of family-owned businesses capable of coping with the future?

**Andreas Bettermann:** Certainly. Even the management trend in large-scale multinationals is towards structures that are familiar from family businesses.

What is the secret to the success which OBO Bettermann has enjoyed over the last century, and will hopefully see over the coming one?

**Andreas Bettermann:** There is no one simple formula which everything can be reduced to. But one of our company’s mottos sums it up quite well: “Just when you think you’ve achieved a lot, it’s time to take the next step,” or, as we have been saying on our anniversary: “100 years of enthusiasm for change.”



## Courage and achievement

**The Metal Competence Centre was completed in 2011, just in time for OBO Bettermann's 100th birthday, and having been brought step by step into operation since spring 2010.**

Although the occasion might well have deserved it, the intention behind this timed opening was in no way to congratulate ourselves on a corporate waymark. The thinking behind the Metal Competence Centre was to bring together production structures which used to be scattered across several different locations in Menden. Yet even that restructuring was not the central motivation behind the investment.

The Metal Competence Centre epitomises OBO Bettermann's objective of concentrating its expertise for the benefit of its customers and the electrical market in Germany, Europe and worldwide.

Being competent means using one's capacities and skills in order to be responsible for something. OBO considers itself responsible for:

- Leading performance in production technology
- Leading performance in market penetration
- Leading performance in logistics

In short, responsible for leading performance in the service of its customers. OBO Bettermann stands for continuity and innovation, and for decades the company has been proving that high-quality products and collaborative closeness to the trades and to electrical wholesalers are guarantees for healthy growth and sustainable earnings.



Serving this objective is the actual mission of the new Metal Competence Centre. Three hundred metres long and a hundred metres wide, the building houses 250 employees who work around the clock in three shifts.

With an effective area of 30,000 square metres, one of the region's biggest construction projects was completed in 2011, housing a new production facility for electrotechnical infrastructure with an integrated hot-dip galvanising plant, offices and service areas. In the new production hall, the hot-dip galvanising plant – among the world's most modern – began operation in spring 2010.

The new plant improves the quality of galvanisation on products such as cable support systems, but it also allows OBO to respond much more quickly to customer requests. Nowadays, it only takes a few hours to get from the raw material stage to the finished component being dispatched by trucks. The workplaces are emission-free and ergonomically designed in accordance with the latest research.

OBO Bettermann has demonstrated courage and steadfastness in holding to its expansion plans despite economically turbulent times, and in confirming Germany as a location by investing more than 40 million euros in the new Metal Competence Centre in Menden between 2008 and 2011.

It was the largest single investment in the company's history. This courage was what, in 2011, won OBO, and in particular Junior Director Andreas Bettermann, Germany's Mittelstand Award, an award for the small and medium-sized business sector of the country's industry.



Ulrich Bettermann's role and significance in this cannot be overstated. It was he who, together with the family company's next generation of leaders, held unwaveringly to the investment and pushed it through in full, while financial advisors shook their supposedly wise heads in dismay.

At the plant, more than 15 million metres of cable support systems are manufactured each year, which if laid end-to-end would reach from Ottawa in Canada across the Atlantic and the African continent all the way to Jakarta in south-east Asian Indonesia.

The hot-dip galvanising plant is designed for an annual capacity of 25,000 tonnes of steel. The vapour produced is extracted by suction and cleaned – all 35,000 cubic metres per hour of it. The galvanising bath is 6.5 metres long, 1.3 metres wide and 3.5 metres deep, and has a capacity of 260 tonnes of zinc.





1,000 euros for every year of OBO:  
100,000 euros donation to  
SOS Children's Village School  
in Vietnam



To mark OBO Bettermann's hundredth birthday the SOS Children's Village Ben Tre in Vietnam will receive 100,000 euros for the development of a school.

At its big anniversary Gala and the opening of its Metal Competence Centre at its headquarters in Menden, in Germany's Sauerland region, the company abstained from receiving gifts and asked instead for donations towards the school. Customers and business partners of OBO Bettermann donated a total of €54,461.93, and OBO itself rounded up the figure so that 1,000 euros would be sent to Vietnam for every year of the company's history.

Our picture shows OBO Managing Director Andreas Bettermann (left) handing over a symbolic donation cheque to Peter Wiechmann, project manager for corporate sponsorships. The SOS Children's Village Ben Tre was opened in December 1997, and is situated in the centre of that province's capital. Ben Tre province lies on the Mekong delta approximately 80 kilometres south-west of Ho Chi Minh City.



**SOS  
KINDERDORF**



## OBO likes champions

**OBO Bettermann and Borussia Dortmund are linked not only by one hundred years of tradition, but also by their considerable present-day successes. The reigning German football champions celebrated their anniversary two years ago, while OBO turns one hundred this year – a fitting occasion for a new, 800 square metre OBO Lounge at the Dortmund-based club’s stadium.**

In a wordplay acknowledging the electrical trade, which uses 30,000 OBO products on building sites all over the world, and Borussia, who are at the top of Germany’s Bundesliga, OBO’s proprietor Ulrich Bettermann said, “OBO mag Meister, und Meister mögen OBO” – OBO likes champions, and master-tradesmen like OBO. The new OBO Lounge accommodates 350 visitors and is serviced by a catering team. It can also be hired for celebrations, seminars and events at the stadium outside of match times. The lounge’s motto could not be more fitting: “Give Your Best”.

The family company, headed by Ulrich Bettermann and his son Andreas Bettermann, is not only concerned with the Group’s global growth, but is also socially and culturally committed – and engaged in sport, as well. The OBO Arena for Young Footballers was opened in 2010 in Menden; legendary goalkeeper Sepp Maier and German national handball coach Heiner Brand have both featured at OBO Bettermann events.

The OBO Lounge is one of the largest event facilities at the Dortmund stadium. Around the stands it has a second lounge, the Borussia Park, the Business Club 09, regulars’ tables, a conference centre and a press room.



*Ulrich Bettermann and Borussia Dortmund managing director Hans-Joachim Watzke (right) have agreed on a partnership between OBO Bettermann and the German Bundesliga champions.*



# Giving your best. Anniversary raffle 2011. Enter now!

Following an excellent response and the successful raffling of last year's prize (which we will report on in one of the forthcoming OBO Blick issues), OBO is now offering a fantastic adventure holiday to Finland (Lapland) which will be raffled among everyone who enters. Get enthusiastic for change and take part now.

## Highlights

Snowmobile safari, husky safari, snowshoe hiking at night, a visit to a reindeer farm, five nights in a log cabin and one night in a snow hotel, dinner in Snowland (igloo restaurant), a ride on an icebreaker, a swim in the Arctic sea and dining at top-class restaurants.

Members of OBO Points are automatically entered into the raffle. You can become an OBO Points member at [www.obo-points.com](http://www.obo-points.com).



[WWW.OBO-BETTERMANN.COM](http://WWW.OBO-BETTERMANN.COM)

