

“Hierarchies don’t apply when it comes to innovations”

With more than 25 years of leadership experience, Jörg Brunecker is one of the highest-profile voices in the sector of trenchless technology. In an interview with GSTT Executive Director Dr Klaus Beyer, the 54-year-old talks about his confidence in the innovativeness of trenchless construction methods:

A high standard of execution, on-the-job safety, as well as client and employee satisfaction help master the immense current challenges. At his company Swietelsky-Faber GmbH Kanalsanierung, Brunecker puts his faith in motivated employees, flat hierarchies and the conservation of our resources.



was born in Oldenburg, northwest Germany, in 1966 and studied urban water management at Oldenburg University of Applied Sciences. He began his career in 1994, when he joined a small construction firm as head of pipe rehabilitation. In 1997 he became European Product Manager for Uponor Anger’s rehabilitation division. From 2001 until 2007 he headed the Hamburg branch of Insituform before serving as General Sales Manager Europe for Chevalier Pipe Technologies. From 2009 until 2014 he was an executive director at Insituform, where he was in charge of foreign units, sales and marketing.

Since 2014, Brunecker has been general manager of Swietelsky-Faber GmbH Kanalsanierung. In addition, his role as a committee chairman for international standardisation bodies ISO and CEN makes Brunecker a highly influential voice in the field of pipe rehabilitation.



Dr.-Eng. Klaus Beyer, Managing Director

German Society for Trenchless Technology e.V. (GSTT)

Eng. Jörg Brunecker

Managing Director Swietelsky-Faber GmbH Kanalsanierung



Dr. Beyer:

Mr Brunecker, I’d like to start by asking what makes trenchless construction and sewer rehabilitation so interesting for you personally?

Jörg Brunecker:

When I was a kid, my father used to say: “Son, look for a job in the sewage industry, it’ll never go out of business.” But obviously that wasn’t the only thing that motivated me. The construction industry is full of interesting challenges. In the wastewater sector, a properly functioning infrastructure is essential for protecting the environment – and, by extension, our health. It’s also a sector in which the implementation of the proper functioning requisite is very well regulated by legal provisions like the EU Water Framework Directive, Germany’s Federal Water Act and the water laws of its individual states.



Our sewer networks are planned, constructed and operated in keeping with accepted codes of practice, and in view of the high replacement value of those systems, the cost effectiveness and efficiency of the technologies deployed plays a very significant role for all of us. Then there are the technical challenges and tasks that come up in day-to-day practice and are changing constantly. And last but definitely not least, I'm driven by the determination not to lay the burden of protecting the environment and preserving the value of our infrastructure on our children's shoulders – even if I'm only a small cog in a big machine.

Dr. Beyer: It's no secret that the high-tech demands made of the process, equipment and materials technology involved with sewer rehabilitation are evolving at breathtaking speed. How do you manage to keep pace with developments?

Jörg Brunecker: We've fine-tuned our sensors so that we can identify the short and long-term tendencies in the sector and the market at a very early stage. We work with several external consultants and have set up numerous internal technical task groups whose members are in constant contact with the market players and take a collaborative and sometimes controversial approach in their search for answers.

We're guided by the technical curiosity of our team, which is something I always find refreshing. "There's no such thing as can't" – I guess you could say that's our motto. On top of that, every member of staff always gets to have their say internally – regardless of whether they're an apprentice, a white-collar worker, a technician or an engineer. Hierarchies don't apply when it comes to innovations; it's the best argument that matters, not a person's position.

Seeing our staff's integrity when it comes to our core values and team-oriented spirit of innovation, I can't help but share their enthusiasm. Every single day, they show me that innovativeness is what we're all about: it's what we live for. And they demonstrate that to the outside world too – in our partnerships with suppliers, institutes and clients. Our innovations aren't restricted to R&D either. We're firmly convinced that every single suggestion for improvement helps us move forward – even if it ends up not being implemented.

Dr. Beyer: What role does the company's management play in relation to innovations?

Jörg Brunecker: In our case the hierarchy certainly plays a role but it's not the measure of all things. My main focus is on making sure our internal values and goals are respected: it's vital for management to lead by example. It's very important to behave with integrity and be an authentic role model. And it goes without saying that you have to respect people's individuality too, because you can't just lump everyone together – every leadership personality is different. I believe those are the key factors for a successful company. This basic setup moves our company forward – and what's more, it boosts motivation and makes what can often be very hard work a lot more enjoyable.

Dr. Beyer: From what you said before, sustainability is very important to you. So how do you practice sustainability in terms of what you do as a company?

As a construction company, we obviously have to make sure we earn money. But that doesn't mean we neglect our responsibility to the environment: protecting our environment is very important to us and we always try to contribute to sustainability in any way we can by implementing energy-saving innovations and projects. That sense of responsibility is firmly anchored in our corporate guidelines. At Swietelsky-Faber GmbH Kanalsanierung, we apply those principles in every field of activity and use them to set benchmarks for the suppliers we source our equipment and materials from as well. We've been optimising the energy efficiency of our installation equipment and all our offices for many years now, and the efficiency potential is still far from exhausted.

Let me give you an example: some of our construction plant has already been equipped with high-performance rechargeable batteries as an alternative to diesel-powered generators. As verified by our second energy audit according to DIN EN 16247, the various measures we've taken have enabled us to achieve an 8% reduction in fuel consumption in relation to revenue. The substitution of fossil fuels with renewable resources has got underway in the construction sector but there's still a long way to go.

Dr. Beyer: What about the next generation: would you say youngsters have a different perspective when it comes to their professional careers?

Jörg Brunecker: With 15 apprentices and trainees, as well as various young engineers and white-collar staff, our company is lowering the average age of its workforce considerably as compared to other firms. In my view, the young colleagues who start their careers with us are much more focused on sustainability, flexibility and doing meaningful work. I think the way priorities have shifted for the young generation is remarkable: social skills and protecting our environment are often more important to them than going all out to climb the career ladder. I respect that.

About the company

Swietelsky-Faber GmbH Kanalsanierung is owned in equal parts by two construction groups, Eiffage and Swietelsky Baugesellschaft, which together employ approx. 80,000 people and generate revenue of more than €20 billion. In recent years, Swietelsky-Faber GmbH Kanalsanierung has evolved into what is classed as a (large corporation of the German business commercial code.

Despite its high volume of state-of-the-art assets for the installation of UV-cured liners, market leadership is not the decisive factor for Swietelsky-Faber Kanalsanierung. The company is driven not by market shares but by its self-defined goals. While a healthy profit is not unimportant, the company aspires to guarantee an excellent standard of execution and the maximum degree of on-the-job safety. The satisfaction of its customers and the welfare of its workforce and the environment are its top priorities. Swietelsky-Faber Kanalsanierung is currently expanding its locations in Europe and will continue to make substantial investments in staff and equipment for the maintenance of wastewater infrastructure.

www.swietelsky-faber.de