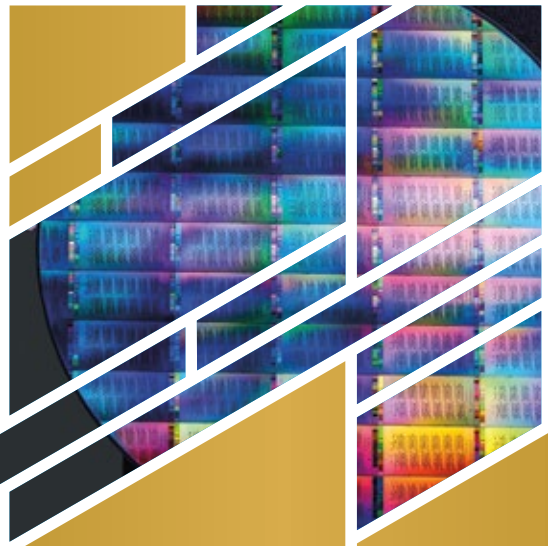
FERCHAU

What's N3xt

Connecting People and Technologies



Markets, courage and people

№ 31

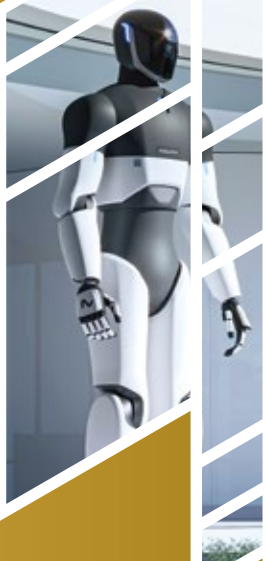
Accelerating progress for 60 years

№ 04

60 YEARS CREATING TOMORROW

The future is made of technology

№ 12



01-2026

11

1966 – 2026

First we had a customer, then we had an office.

Time to look back – on our beginnings, but above all on the strong link between us and our customers: Technology as a driver of progress.

In this issue of What's N3xt, we celebrate FERCHAU's birthday with a few memories and plenty of perspectives. Here's to the future!

Prefer to read the current issue on your laptop or e-reader? Click here for the PDF: ferchau.com/go/downloads-en

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CONTENTS

ACCELERATING PROGRESS FOR 60 YEARS

It started in 1966 with a single drawing table, and has developed into an international technology service provider with 10,000 employees. Founder Heinz Ferchau and his son Frank Ferchau, now Chairman of the Group, look back together on six decades full of courage, crises, successes and changes. **Find out why »letting go« is a success factor and why FERCHAU is acting as a progress accelerator today more than ever.**


»We always
want to design –
this aspiration
is at our core.«

»If I wanted to make a phone call, I had to drive to my father-in-law's house or send telegrams.«

Heinz Ferchau

From a one-man company to the German market leader

Heinz Ferchau, graduate engineer and founder of FERCHAU Konstruktion, epitomises the rise of German engineering like no other. In 1966, with courage, strategic foresight and drive, he laid the foundations for a company that has developed into the market leader for technology services over the years. Heinz Ferchau's life's work stands for pioneering spirit and maximum reliability. He himself says: »I really wanted to be self-employed and live my dream.«

Heinz Ferchau, you are regarded as the »founder of engineering services« in Germany. What was it like in the 1960s, and why did you set up the company?

HEINZ FERCHAU: That was quite simple: I was driven by the desire to be self-employed. I had the right training with engineering but I didn't want to spend my life with just a drawing board in front me – I wanted to achieve more. After evening school, the Rheinische Ingenieurschule and jobs in the chemical industry, I made up my mind over Christmas. In the summer of 1966, I finally opened FERCHAU Konstruktion GmbH with a single employee.

How were you so successful so quickly? Was it technical expertise or a feel for the market?

HEINZ FERCHAU: Initially, two factors came together: The chemical industry was doing extremely well due to the high demand for plastics and fuel, and experts in pipeline, steel and tank construction were desperately sought. At the same time, the Steinmüller company, where I had trained, was unable to take on the graduates of its technical school for economic reasons. It was clear to me: These are the perfect people the market needs!

You skilfully brought supply and demand together...

HEINZ FERCHAU: Exactly, and in the run-up to the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, the German economy really took off. The market demanded engineering services, which were primarily utilised in England and the Netherlands at the time. So I was able to move around in a relatively free space and just »run riot«.

Frank Ferchau, you have been the spokesperson for the management board since 2005. What values did your father pass on to you?

FRANK FERCHAU: As the founder of the company, my father is the formative figure for me. Two of his values are very important to me: openness to change and the ability to let go. I can say: »You do that – and feel free to do it differently from me«. In this way, changes and progress can be experienced in practice. Without these values, the 60-year history of FERCHAU would not have been written in this way.

You yourself let go in 2025 by switching from the CEO's desk to the role of Chairman. How does this change feel?

FRANK FERCHAU: It wasn't a retirement where I had to stop working from one day to the next. My entrepreneurial core element – the will to shape change processes – is still there. I never get bored in my new role and I enjoy the business dialogue with the excellent protagonists here at the company.

What were the biggest challenges of the transformation?

FRANK FERCHAU: After 30 years in a leadership role, you inevitably leave your mark. Simply changing positions would not have gone far enough, which is why we combined the personnel change with an organisational restructuring. This involved a comprehensive transformation towards four autonomous business units, all working together to achieve the Group's strategic objectives. In this structure, individual leaders take on a much stronger entrepreneurial role than before. The rules of the game have changed, and we all had to grow into these new roles together. Taking such a step is only possible with an experienced management team.

Most of the members of your management team have been on board for a long time. Is that a recipe for success?

FRANK FERCHAU: Continuity in leadership is definitely an element of success. Today, you need a wide range of experience for strategic realisation. The whole thing is based on the conviction that a team is always more than an individual, because people contribute different approaches to solutions with their own perspectives. Nonetheless, we are always bringing talent and impetus into the company from outside. The combination of comprehensive knowledge, a wealth of shared experience and fresh ideas is perfect. Nobody here thinks they're Elon Musk – in the end, it's always the team that delivers.

Heinz Ferchau, for a long time you were the lone wolf at the head of the company. What were your biggest challenges?

HEINZ FERCHAU: In the beginning, it was literally day-to-day business, everything happened »from one day to the next«. I once travelled to seven engineering schools in the Rhineland to recruit students before they graduated. We needed staff because we had won orders. If I wanted to make a phone call, I had to drive to my father-in-law's house or send telegrams. There were many ups and downs, and it was rumoured several times behind closed doors that FERCHAU had allegedly gone bankrupt. But I always had the will to do something and never lost my courage.

Market conditions were often bad for business, from the oil crisis to the aftermath of reunification and the dotcom bubble. How did you perceive this?

HEINZ FERCHAU: I've experienced these waves since the start-up phase, they're part of the business. Things went well for a few years, then badly, then they got better again. We can't influence that, we just have to deal with it. Today, we have a dozen golden years behind us, the economy has almost run itself – a real stroke of luck. FERCHAU has emerged stronger from every wave trough.

FRANK FERCHAU: There is a big difference today compared to previous crises: The combustion engine is slowly approaching the last third of its development, and the same applies to process chemistry and petrochemistry – all the foundations of our prosperity.

We are also facing demographic challenges. It is also becoming clear that we are no longer fast enough to focus on innovation drivers, but are lagging behind old developments. Unlike in previous crises, this is a real structural change. The strategy of waiting and seeing – it will get better at some point – cannot be a solution today, everyone realises that.

How do you support your customers in this change?
FRANK FERCHAU: We see ourselves as an accelerator of progress. FERCHAU helps customers to implement innovations in projects, adapt production processes and scale business models. If a company suddenly receives a large order that it cannot handle with its own resources or expertise, wants to enter a new sector or advance a technical innovation, we support the customer in moving into new dimensions. That's what I call accelerating progress.

The pressure to change driven by regulation is high, in addition to the rapid technological development in all areas of engineering and especially in IT. Is it becoming too much for the economy?
FRANK FERCHAU: I have a counter question: Does focussing on one technology lead to progress? I am a clear advocate of technological openness, and not just when it comes to vehicle drives. Conversely, this means that OEMs must continue to develop their electric platforms, hydrogen propulsion systems and the combustion engine in parallel. There are also combinations of these, such as the hybrid. With additional skills, capacities and experience, we create new opportunities to shorten project lead times in international competition. After all, a new technology is only really sexy if you as an entrepreneur are the first or second in the market.

How have customer requirements changed over the years?
FRANK FERCHAU: I generally do not see any significant change here. The customer sees technological challenges first and foremost, whereby the focus has shifted from mechanics to electrics to digitalisation. The world has also become smaller: China used to be a production location, today it is a competitor against which we have to measure ourselves. But I actually always meet technology enthusiasts who are trying to adapt their business case to the current framework conditions. I like to talk to them on a technical level and try to understand what the challenge is about. That is a privilege.

As Chairman, how do you manage to maintain contact with customers?
FRANK FERCHAU: An important point! I travel to a FERCHAU branch at least once a week, and that always involves a customer visit. The beauty of the dialogues is that the customer tells me how they see the world through their own eyes. I have to understand the perspective and be able to integrate it into our organisation.

If you look a few years into the future, what issues do you absolutely need to tackle?
FRANK FERCHAU: The crucial question for us is aimed at further growth markets that we are addressing, there is no alternative. We also need to take our employees with us through the upcoming changes. What is needed is an intensive dialogue on transformation, for example on digitalisation, AI, the jobs of the future and internationalisation. After all, in order to optimally accelerate our customers' progress, we ourselves must embrace advances in technology and competences.

What overarching vision do you have for FERCHAU in the run-up to its next major anniversary?
FRANK FERCHAU: My guiding principle is this: more important than the goals we want to achieve are the structures that enable us to achieve them. If you plan to double the number of locations, you simply cannot do so with the same organisational setup. Growth at FERCHAU has never been an end in itself; it has always been a necessity if we want to act as a true shaper of the market. To do that, you need a certain critical mass – big is beautiful. As a small engineering and IT services provider, you are shaped by others. Our ambition is to shape things ourselves. For us, progress means turning tomorrow's potential into today's reality – and that claim will remain at the very heart of what we do for decades to come.

And what do you wish for the future of FERCHAU as a company founder?
HEINZ FERCHAU: In the early years, it was always important to me that I could pay my employees on time. Once I wasn't able to do so, and that still annoys me today. And I hope that the company will uphold the classic virtues of, i.e. diligence, reliability and thoroughness. This is how we have made our innovations great: with clever minds and our values.

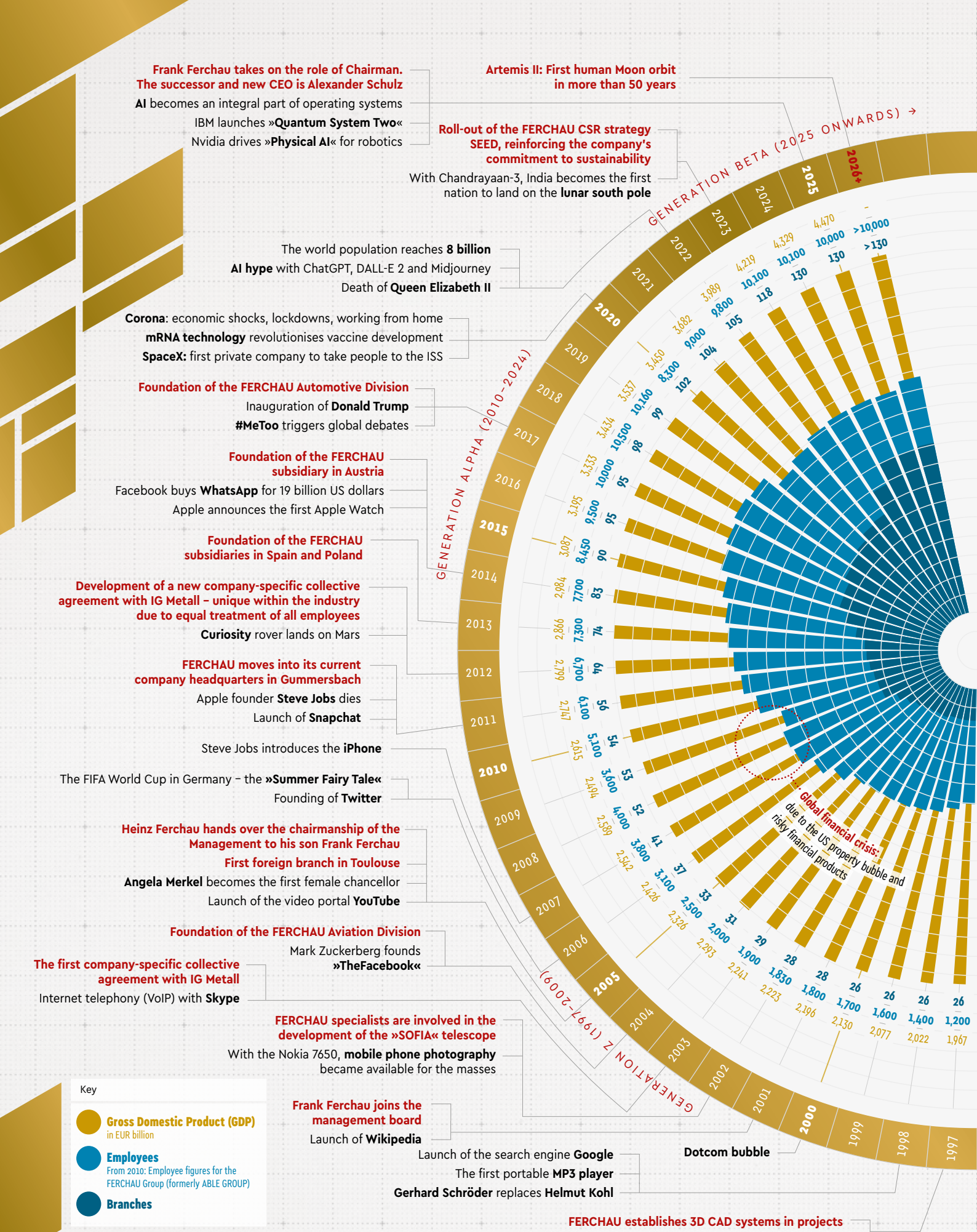
»For us, progress means turning tomorrow's potential into today's reality.«

Frank Ferchau

»A successor needs both the ambition and the capability.«

Frank Ferchau embodies the dynamic evolution of the company: With his qualifications as an engineer and businessman, he has been driving the transformation of FERCHAU into the European market leader for engineering and IT since 1994, from 2001 as Managing Partner and then under the motto »Wir entwickeln Sie weiter« (We develop you further).

At the beginning of 2025, he moved to the position of Chairman of the FERCHAU Group. Here and now, Frank Ferchau is providing strategic impetus for the coming change – as an entrepreneur of action who combines tradition with courageous foresight.


Frank Ferchau takes on the role of Chairman. The successor and new CEO is Alexander Schulz
AI becomes an integral part of operating systems
IBM launches »Quantum System Two«
Nvidia drives »Physical AI« for robotics
Artemis II: First human Moon orbit in more than 50 years
Roll-out of the FERCHAU CSR strategy SEED, reinforcing the company's commitment to sustainability
With Chandrayaan-3, India becomes the first nation to land on the lunar south pole
GENERATION BETA (2025 ONWARDS) →
The world population reaches 8 billion
AI hype with ChatGPT, DALL-E 2 and Midjourney
Death of Queen Elizabeth II
Corona: economic shocks, lockdowns, working from home
mRNA technology revolutionises vaccine development
SpaceX: first private company to take people to the ISS
GENERATION ALPHA (2010–2024)
Foundation of the FERCHAU Automotive Division
Inauguration of Donald Trump
#MeToo triggers global debates
Foundation of the FERCHAU subsidiary in Austria
Facebook buys WhatsApp for 19 billion US dollars
Apple announces the first Apple Watch
Foundation of the FERCHAU subsidiaries in Spain and Poland
Development of a new company-specific collective agreement with IG Metall – unique within the industry due to equal treatment of all employees
Curiosity rover lands on Mars
FERCHAU moves into its current company headquarters in Gummersbach
Apple founder Steve Jobs dies
Launch of Snapchat
Steve Jobs introduces the iPhone
The FIFA World Cup in Germany – the »Summer Fairy Tale«
Founding of Twitter
Heinz Ferchau hands over the chairmanship of the Management to his son Frank Ferchau
First foreign branch in Toulouse
Angela Merkel becomes the first female chancellor
Launch of the video portal YouTube
Foundation of the FERCHAU Aviation Division
Mark Zuckerberg founds »TheFacebook«
The first company-specific collective agreement with IG Metall
Internet telephony (VoIP) with Skype
GENERATION Z (1997–2009)
FERCHAU specialists are involved in the development of the »SOFIA« telescope
With the Nokia 7650, mobile phone photography became available for the masses
Frank Ferchau joins the management board
Launch of Wikipedia
Launch of the search engine Google
The first portable MP3 player
Gerhard Schröder replaces Helmut Kohl
Dotcom bubble
FERCHAU establishes 3D CAD systems in projects
Deep Blue computer defeats world chess champion Garry Kasparov
Global financial crisis: due to the US property bubble and risky financial products
2026+
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1,800
28
2,130
1,700
26
2,077
1,600
26
2,022
1,400
26
1,967
1,200
26
Key
Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
in EUR billion
Employees
From 2010: Employee figures for the FERCHAU Group (formerly ABLE GROUP)
Branches

FERCHAU through the ages

← BABY BOOMERS (1946–1964)

GENERATION X (1965–1980)

GENERATION Y (1981–1996)

1966 — **Foundation by Heinz Ferchau**

1967 — **Gross salary of a Technical Draughtsperson at FERCHAU: DM 1,000.00**
Launch of **colour television** in Germany

1968 — Assassination of **Martin Luther King**
Presentation of the first **computer mouse**

1969 — **Our personnel costs in December: over DM 130,800**
Apollo 11: first manned **Moon landing**
Woodstock Festival

1970 — First **Microprocessor**: Intel 4004
IBM introduces the **floppy disc**

1971 — **Our payroll accounting is computerised**
First scientific **pocket calculator** from **HP**

1972 — **FERCHAU consistently puts the legal requirements for temporary employment into practice**
The world's first **mobile phone**
Oil crisis: the first car-free Sundays

1973 — IBM PC: the first **personal computer**
Ronald Reagan becomes US President
Prince **Charles** marries Lady **Diana**
MTV goes on air
First **standard airbag** from Mercedes

1974 — **Thanks to FERCHAU: first fully automatic lane setting station at Opel**
Motorola DynaTAC 8000x: the first commercially available **mobile phone**
Sales launch of the **compact disc** in Europe

1975 — **The first CAD system in our Heilbronn branch**
Reactor accident in **Chernobyl**
First PC virus: »Brain« spreads worldwide via floppy discs
Mir: The first permanently manned space station

1976 — German **reunification**
First hires from the former GDR states
Windows 3.0: Microsoft's commercial breakthrough
Launch of the **Hubble telescope:** a new era of astronomy begins

1977 — **World Wide Web**:
CERN makes the internet public
Foundation of the **European Union**

1978 — **FERCHAU is certified according to DIN ISO 9001**
The first **smartphone**: Nokia 9000 Communicator
Birth of the **cloned sheep Dolly**

1979 — **Flood of engineers:** Structural change, reunification and a weak economy characterise the labour market

1980 — 250 / 1 — 253 / 20 — 273 / 35 — 305 / 45 — 361 / 55 — 400 / 75 — 436 / 95 — 486 / 130 — 526 / 190 — 552 / 210 — 597 / 225 — 657 / 380 — 679 / 490 — 737 / 570 — 784 / 630 — 826 / 710 — 860 / 680 — 898 / 500 — 942 / 675 — 984 / 805 — 1,037 / 970 — 1,065 / 1,050 — 1,123 / 1,055 — 1,201 / 1,290 — 1,307 / 1,400 — 1,592 / 1,400 — 1,710 / 960 — 1,757 / 645 — 1,838 / 545 — 1,900 / 745 — 1,929 / 1,000 — 26 — 26 — 25 — 25 — 25 — 25 — 23 — 23 — 23 — 22 — 22 — 21 — 21 — 21 — 19 — 17 — 15 — 11 — 11 — 9 — 8 — 6 — 4 — 2 — 1 — 1 — 1 — 1 — 1 — 1 — 1 — 1 — 1

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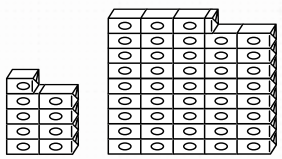
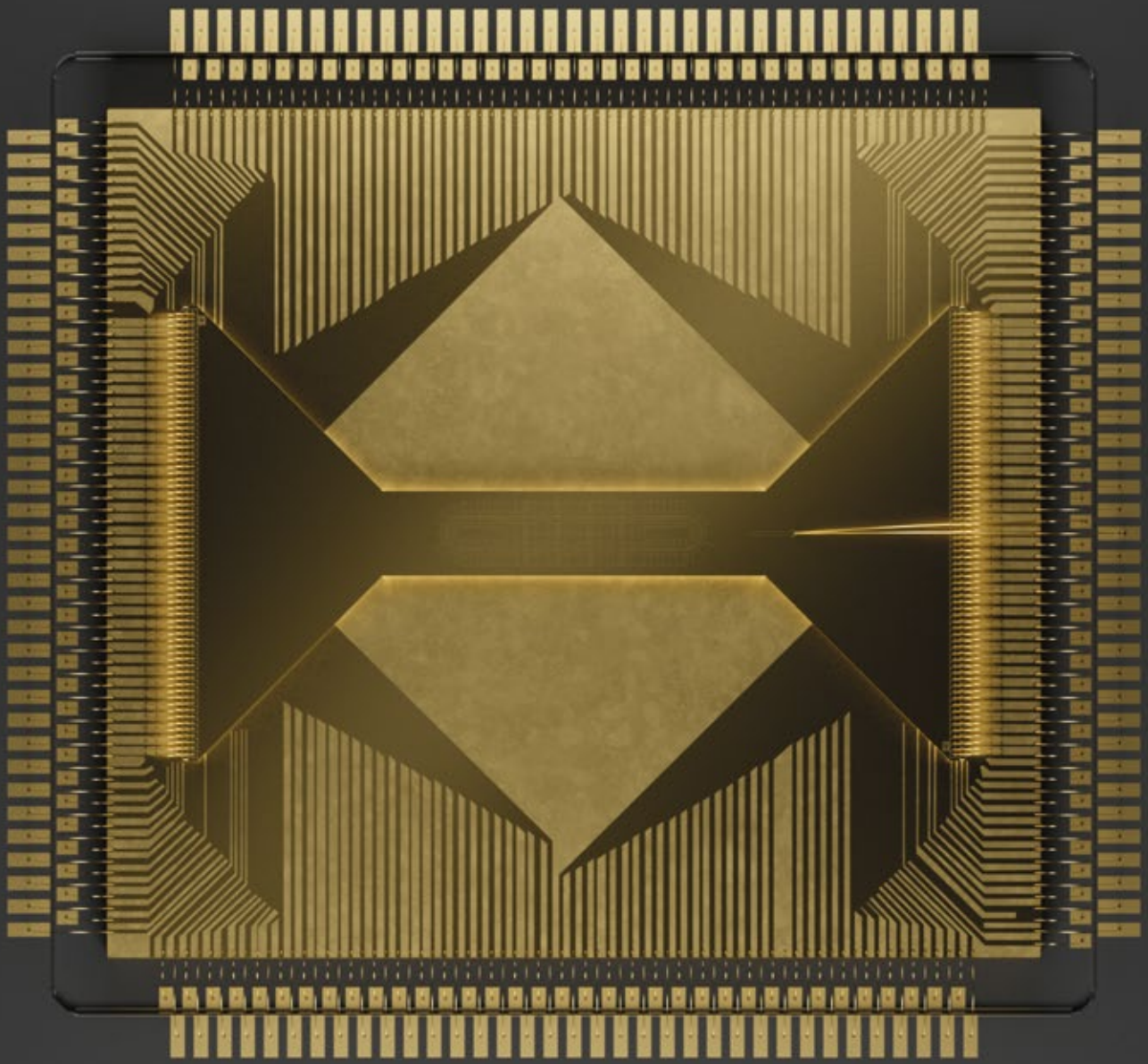
5 times more butter for one hour's work

1974 vs. 2025: butter price/labour hour check

	Engineering hours at FERCHAU	Butter 250 g
1974	17 DM (~€8.69)	1.94 DM (~€ 0.99)
2025	€ 92	€ 2.13
Growth	***+959%***	***+115%***



An engineer today can buy five times more with one hour's work.



Chip of the quantum computer »Quantinuum System Model H2«:
On a component just a few millimetres in size, individual atoms are arranged as in a microscopic grid and precisely controlled: one of the most promising approaches for future high-performance computers.

THE FUTURE IS MADE OF TECHNOLOGY

HOW RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT ARE SHAPING THE FUTURE OF INDUSTRY

The best way to predict the future is to shape it yourself: We show which technologies innovators are using to shape our everyday lives, science and the global economy of tomorrow.

The future in 1966: For science fiction fans, it began on 8 September with the launch of the Star Trek series about the flight into the infinite expanses of space. At the same time, in the real world, NASA's Gemini programme was replaced by Apollo. Astronauts such as Neil Armstrong and David Scott docked two spaceships in Earth's orbit for the first time – a life-threatening manoeuvre that later became a prerequisite for the Moon landings. However, it would be another three years before Apollo 11 was the first successful Moon landing in manned spaceflight.

Today, more than 60 years after the start of the Apollo programme, the focus is once again on space. The Moon seems to be just a stopover on the way to the future, the goal is Mars. »I believe that a manned mission there is feasible, but the financial outlay and the psychological strain are enormous,« said ***Prof Dr Felix Huber***, director of Space Operations and Astronaut Training at the German Aerospace Centre (DLR).

Between »conceivable« and »feasible« lies the broad field of research and development. This is where the technical innovations of the future are created. An example: As part of NASA's Artemis mission, in which the European Space Agency ESA and DLR are involved, humans are to land on the Moon for the first time since Apollo 17 in December 1972. The construction of a space station is planned there – a project for eternity. Once again, Apollo's twin sister makes this clear: Beyond time, money and ideas, major technological achievements like Artemis require one thing above all: staying power.

Prof Dr Felix Huber

Director of the DLR Institute of Space Operations and Astronaut Training

Prof Dr Andreas Tünnermann

Director of the Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Engineering (IOF)

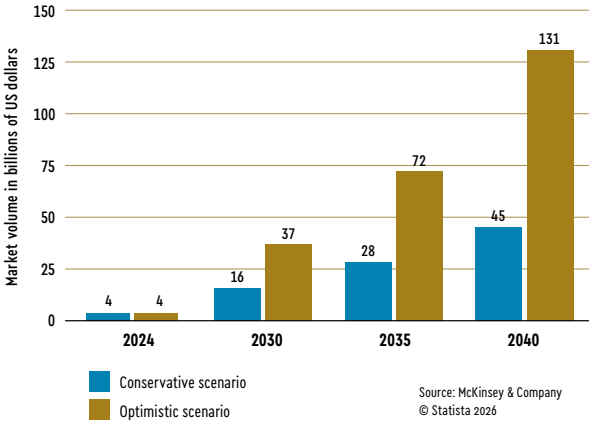
The first and second quantum revolution

While space travel received a great deal of public attention in 1966 – via a black-and-white television screen – quantum physics was still going on in the laboratory at the time. Although application-oriented technologies such as laser systems or atomic precision sensors were already in the starting blocks, the influence of quantum physics on today's everyday technologies was not foreseeable. »Microchips, lasers, GPS – these are just three of thousands of examples of devices or processes that would not exist without the first quantum revolution«, says ***Prof Dr Andreas Tünnermann***, director of the Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Engineering (IOF).

Not only that: Without quantum technology there would be no smartphones and no AI. Research into quantum effects in semiconductors has made modern processors, memories and LEDs possible in the first place. »Today, we are experiencing the second quantum revolution with the possibility of controlling individual quanta and thus also utilising quantum phenomena such as entanglement – for example in quantum imaging«, explains physicist Tünnermann. What Einstein described as a »spooky action at a distance« is intended to take research into microorganisms, for example, to a new level. Biology, environmental technology and medicine benefit from this.

This also applies to the previously unrivalled precision and measurement sensitivity of quantum sensor technology. »Future applications include measuring brain waves and, as a result, the possibility of controlling digital assistance systems with thoughts«, says Fraunhofer director Tünnermann. Communication via screen or voice output and the control of prostheses or exoskeletons will support people with disabilities in everyday life and make it easier for them to participate in society. McKinsey forecasts the annual market potential of quantum technologies to be around 200 billion US dollars by 2040.

Forecast for the development of the Market potential for quantum computing in the years 2024 to 2040 *(in billion US dollars)*



Quantum technologies on the way to the 200 billion market

And what is the status of the »star« among quantum technologies, quantum computing? According to a report by MIT, around two dozen manufacturers now offer more than 40 different quantum processors (QPUs). Their strengths include simulating quantum systems and analysing large molecules. Using special algorithms, they can complete calculations in hours that would take years on conventional high-performance processors. Their use is still limited. Tünnermann: »Today's systems can address individual tasks. It will be another five to ten years before there is a universal quantum computer that is freely programmable.«

Prof Dr Antonio Krüger

CEO of the German Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI)

Turbos for science

What space travel and quantum technologies have in common in 2026: Artificial intelligence as a turbo-charger that accelerates technical development. ***Prof Dr Antonio Krüger,*** CEO of the German Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI), sees the healthcare sector »on the verge of a real blossoming of knowledge«. Recognising diseases earlier and understanding them better, tailoring medication and treatments – AI helps in many ways to prolong a healthy life. The turbos are massive pattern recognition across billions of data points (such as genome sequences or satellite data) and automated hypothesis testing: AI can carry out thousands and thousands of simulations in seconds to determine how a protein reacts to an active ingredient.

AI also improves prevention. »Smart watches and fitness trackers were just the beginning«, promises AI expert Krüger. Overall, AI in healthcare will soon help the longevity trend to achieve a breakthrough. This includes nanorobots that inspect blood vessels and repair them if necessary, as well as biologically cultivated microchip implants that can replace entire areas of the brain.

Scanning electron microscope image of spherical hydrogel microrobots from the California Institute of Technology (Caltech): *The spheres, which are around 30 micrometres in size – about as thin as a human hair – carry magnetic nanoparticles and active substances and can be navigated to specific tumours in the body using a magnetic field and ultrasound, where they release their medical cargo and are subsequently degraded by the body. The technology is still in the research phase.*

Prof Dr Pero Mićić:

AI – the meta-technology

Prof Dr Pero Mićić, CEO of FutureManagementGroup AG, has a clear favourite when he talks about the most important technologies: »First and foremost is artificial intelligence as a meta-technology. Because it amplifies the most powerful tool we have ever had at our disposal and with which we have shaped the world – the human brain.« Mićić is convinced: »As soon as AI amplifies the human brain, it will make every industry across the entire value chain more productive and creative – at least in theory.« This applies to the production of cheeseburgers as well as the development of CRISPR technologies for the targeted modification of DNA or sustainable energy production.

Longevity for all

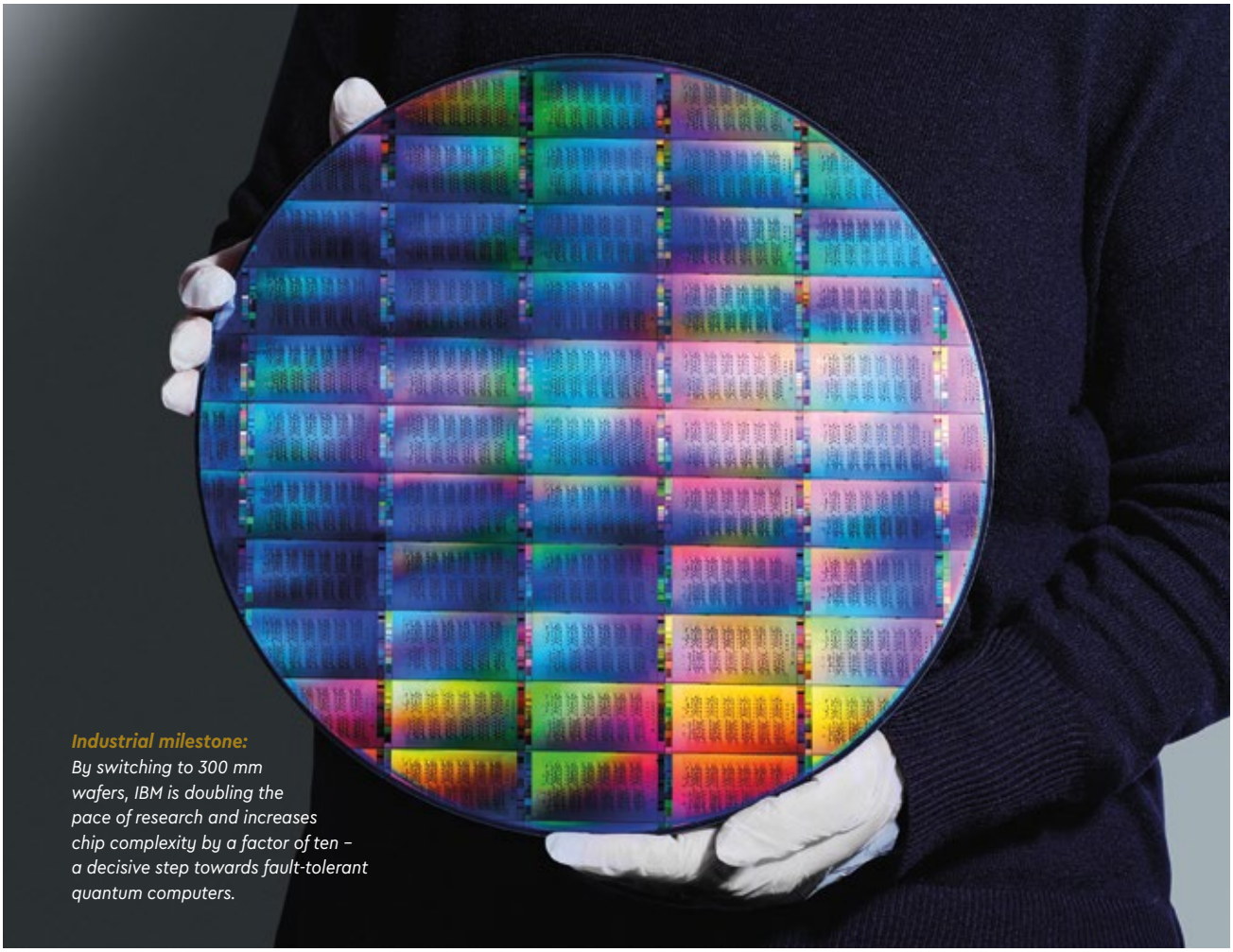
Prof Dr Pero Mićić sees health and medical technology as a key factor in the development of innovations – keyword longevity: »Technological advances will lead to people living even longer and healthier lives in the future, for example through new successes in the fight against cancer.« In ten to twenty years, the disease could have lost its terror, says the future strategist, drawing on major advances in the recent past. Even brain tumour operations can be performed on an outpatient basis in 30 minutes. Mićić: »This is not science fiction, but reality in some European clinics.«

4NE1 (»For Anyone«) from NEURA Robotics:
The adaptive humanoid robot is designed to take on demanding tasks in trade and industry and work safely side by side with humans.

Prof Dr Pero Mićić

Rise of the machines

AI on computers and in company processes is just the first step, machines are now making their way. Prof Dr Pero Mićić calls this evolutionary path »embodied AI«. »This includes not only industrial robotics, but also humanoid robots that fundamentally automate physical work in the service and care sectors – and even in the home«, he emphasises. For him, this category also includes AI-controlled robotaxis and other autonomous vehicles from the aviation and maritime sectors, for example. Mićić is certain: »They will make transport and mobility cheaper, more sustainable and safer.« The AI turbo in data analysis is now being transferred to physical engines and joints. This leads to fewer errors, better scalability and 24/7 use.



Industrial milestone: *By switching to 300 mm wafers, IBM is doubling the pace of research and increases chip complexity by a factor of ten – a decisive step towards fault-tolerant quantum computers.*

AI assistants monitor on-board technology

Artificial intelligence also plays a central role in the development of the life support systems for the Orion spacecraft on its way to Mars. DLR space travel expert Prof Felix Huber emphasises: »We are working on AI-based assistance systems to monitor and control the systems on board. Because by the time we reach Mars at the latest, we won't be able to do this with remote diagnostics and maintenance from Earth.« Industry also benefits from such solutions, for example in aviation. Or in large industrial plants, when it comes to finding the optimum time to replace critical components.

Live longer thanks to smarter technologies

»AI is currently having the greatest impact in the sciences, at the root of technological innovation«, says AI researcher Krüger. As an example, he cites AlphaFold, an AI system developed by Google DeepMind that can predict the 3D structure of proteins from their amino acid sequence. Research tasks that used to take scientists years can now be completed in minutes. In the meantime, the first active ingredients developed with AlphaFold are about to enter the clinical test phase. Experts anticipate a hundredfold to a thousandfold increase in output in the laboratories researching new drugs, reports Prof Krüger.

Energy booster for the future

Whether AI data centres, quantum computers or space flight and space stations: All future technologies have one central challenge in common – they need clean and permanently available energy. One option is nuclear fusion, in which light atomic nuclei fuse to form heavier ones. A small proportion of the mass is converted into energy – a potential energy source of enormous magnitude, as has been the case for billions of years in the interior of the sun. In addition to major international projects and research institutes, more and more start-ups around the world are now working on compact and economical processes. A breakthrough here will give new impetus to all future technologies.

Nuclear fusion made in Germany

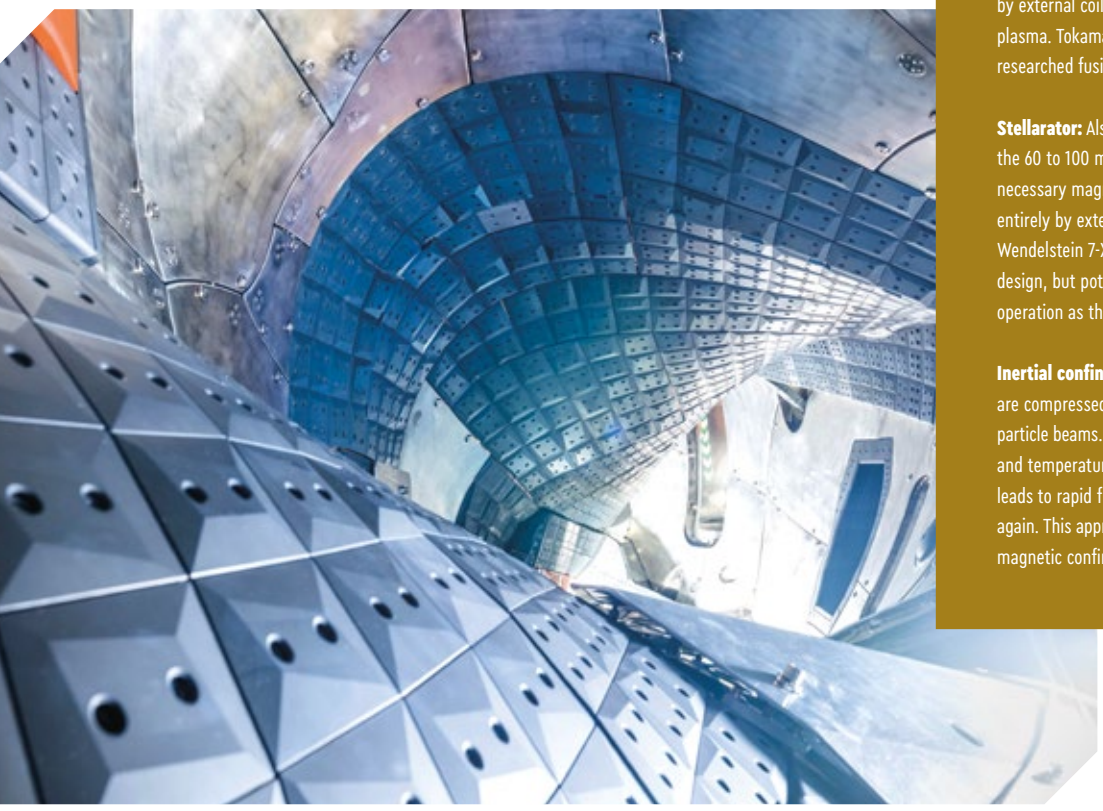
Among the most experienced nuclear fusion researchers is ***Prof Dr Sibylle Günter***, Scientific Director at the Max Planck Institute for Plasma Physics, with sites in Garching and Greifswald. Wendelstein 7-X, currently the world's largest stellarator, is located in Greifswald. With its complex magnetic field geometry, it enables particularly stable plasma states and plays a central role in international fusion research.

When asked when fusion energy will become industrially usable, Prof Günter explains: »We think that a first power plant could supply industrially usable electricity to the grid in around 20 years if we step on the gas now and the framework conditions are right.« Although there are still technical challenges to be solved, concepts are available. Despite the long research period, Günter is optimistic: »One of the most promising options for the realisation of fusion power plants are stellarator-type plants.« To this end, the institute is working with two fusion companies from Germany. »These have brought a completely new dynamic to our field.«

Prof Dr Sibylle Günter

Scientific Director at the Max Planck Institute for Plasma Physics

View into the plasma vessel of Wendelstein 7-X: *Experiments here create a plasma that is up to 100 million degrees hot and enclosed by strong magnetic fields.*



How does the sun's power reach the earth?

Stellarator, tokamak and inertial confinement fusion are three different approaches to getting to grips with nuclear fusion. To put it into context: It is only 15 million degrees hot in the sun, but the pressure there is much higher.

Tokamak: Features a ring-shaped fusion reactor design in which the 150 million degree plasma is confined and stabilised by strong magnetic fields in a doughnut-like chamber. In the French ITER facility, for example, the magnetic fields are generated both by external coils and by a current generated in the plasma. Tokamaks are the most widely used and researched fusion method.

Stellarator: Also utilises magnetic fields to confine the 60 to 100 million degree plasma, but the necessary magnetic field configuration is generated entirely by external coils. Stellarators such as the Wendelstein 7-X in Greifswald are more complex in design, but potentially offer more stable continuous operation as they are less susceptible to faults.

Inertial confinement fusion: Small fuel pellets are compressed and heated by powerful lasers or particle beams. The resulting enormous pressure and temperature peak of over 100 million degrees leads to rapid fusion before the material expands again. This approach differs fundamentally from the magnetic confinement methods.

Next stop: Olympus Mons

So there is still a lot to do. Also for the team led by Prof Huber at DLR, which has set itself the goal of exploring the lunar surface. To this end, DLR and ESA have built the LUNA hall at the DLR site in Cologne: a state-of-the-art analogue facility that realistically simulates the conditions on the Moon. The Human Exploration Control Centre (HECC) is closely linked to this. It is designed as a European control centre in Oberpfaffenhofen for all astronautical and robotic contributions to lunar and Mars missions.

Astronautical space travel – with the exception of the Artemis mission – currently takes place mainly in low Earth orbit on the ISS. There, the Columbus Control Centre – and thus later the HECC – continues to operate the Columbus module of the ISS. It offers Europe the opportunity to test new technologies and processes under space conditions and thus pave the way for future missions to the Moon and Mars.

Space expert Huber explains: »We supply space travellers with energy, air and water on board as they make their way to the Moon and Mars.« According to current knowledge, astronauts would be travelling for half a year or longer, and they would not be able to turn back en route. »The most important prerequisite for such flights is better life support systems that work autonomously in a cycle«, emphasises Huber. »The permanent water cycle alone requires a great deal of expertise and energy over such a long period of time.«

Beyond the horizon

Finally, some good news: Even if the technology fields of AI, quantum, nuclear fusion and space travel form a technological spearhead, the ground of innovation is moving in many other areas. Biotechnology 2.0 will literally »grow« materials and fuels in the future. Neuromorphic computing develops chips that mimic the human brain and use only a fraction of the energy required by today's AI servers. And in the field of new materials, graphene structures and metamaterials that change their properties at the touch of a button are on the horizon. What is science fiction today will form a new market tomorrow.

The world of research and development is not facing a disruptive change in 2026 – it is in the midst of a technological transformation which is making industry history. Creating Tomorrow means not only understanding this transformation, but boldly driving it forward.

WHAT CUSTOMERS SAY ABOUT US

VOICES

Roberto Sarasa Bellosta
R&D Operations & Quality Director
@ HP Large Format Printing, Barcelona

Lived commitment and shared innovations

Our long-standing partnership with FERCHAU exemplifies genuine commitment and a shared drive for innovation.

By pooling our research capacities, we accelerate the development of new products, secure growth opportunities and orientate ourselves closely to the needs of our customers. What I particularly appreciate about working with FERCHAU is not just the result, but the way we work together: We have created a space for real teamwork – supported by people you can trust and who share our passion for technology and innovation.

I am personally very proud of what we have achieved so far. Together with my team, I have been part of this journey, which has presented real challenges as well as great moments. But we have always looked ahead. I would like to thank FERCHAU for their support, commitment and the great people in the team.

Anticipating the needs of customers

Grzegorz Jaczewski
Head of Electrical, Automation and Telecommunications, PROCHEM S.A., Warsaw

A team of FERCHAU engineers has been supporting us for more than a year in meeting the tight deadlines for several key projects.

These are large-scale, complex design initiatives that take months to years to complete and involve many engineers from a wide range of disciplines. FERCHAU's flexible services enable us to cushion the volatility and dynamics of the labour market while meeting the deadline and quality requirements of our multi-disciplinary projects.

When we were looking for alternatives to traditional employment and B2B models, FERCHAU's Warsaw branch seemed like a promising address – and we were right. In a relatively short space of time, both companies have experienced many unexpected twists and unforeseen situations in the field of construction planning – artificial intelligence in engineering is just one example.

The key to the success of HR services lies in long-term cooperation that leads to strong business relationships and makes it possible to »read« – and perhaps even anticipate – the needs of customers. This is no small challenge, but if anyone can master it, it is FERCHAU.

PROCHEM

Marek Korol

Plant Manager, thyssenkrupp Automation Engineering, Gdańsk

A strong foundation for real partnership

I have always found FERCHAU to be an extremely reliable and professional partner.

What I particularly appreciate is the open, direct and pleasant communication, which makes it possible for every conversation to take place at eye level. Our personal exchange is characterised by trust and a genuine interest in our challenges. This attitude creates a strong foundation on which a real partnership can grow. For me, FERCHAU stands for expertise, transparency and a remarkably personal touch in our collaboration.

Fast availability, high flexibility

The collaboration with FERCHAU offers us considerable added value, in particular through the rapid availability of qualified specialists and a high degree of flexibility.

In a dynamic business environment, there are always short-term staffing gaps due to unplanned absences, project peaks or seasonal fluctuations. FERCHAU gives us agility in personnel planning and the placement of competent personnel.

Our decision in favour of FERCHAU as a personnel partner is based on several factors. We particularly appreciate the personal support provided by the

EXOTEC

Christian Eberle

Maintenance Director Central Europe, Exotec Deutschland GmbH

FERCHAU team, because personal contact enables a much better understanding of our specific requirements. We increasingly need specialists who have detailed expertise in narrowly defined areas. FERCHAU also impresses with the speed with which it places candidates, the broad availability of qualified specialists and the flexibility to adapt to our different requirements. The combination of personal service and professional handling makes FERCHAU a reliable partner that we can rely on in a wide variety of personnel situations.

20 — 21

FERCHAU – a partner that excels professionally and inspires personally

For many years, we have enjoyed an extremely trusting and successful partnership with FERCHAU – far beyond our locations in Rosenheim.

Whether at our headquarters in Neutraubling, in Flensburg or in Rosenheim: We experience FERCHAU everywhere as a reliable engineering and IT partner that impresses professionally and inspires on a personal level. Together, we have launched numerous projects – from order development and processing to innovations and complex automation solutions. We are particularly proud of the joint establishment of an innovation laboratory for packaging here in Rosenheim, a real flagship project of our collaboration. What we appreciate about FERCHAU is the combination of technical expertise, a pragmatic approach and a spirit of partnership that always takes place at eye level. For us, FERCHAU is not just a service provider, but a long-standing companion in our technological development.

We would like to congratulate the company on its 60th anniversary – and look forward to continuing our joint success story.

Dr.-Ing. Thomas Hensel

Head of Engineering Packaging Technology, Krones AG

KRONES

Tobias Keuter

*is **Manager International Business Development** at FERCHAU. He works hard and systematically to ensure that existing German customers can benefit from the international offerings just as much as local companies. »Due to the volatility in the market, we are in a constant state of transformation, and internationalisation is a key aspect of this«, says Keuter.*

Harald Felten

*Harald Felten is **Vice President International** at FERCHAU; he opened the first international office in Toulouse over 20 years ago. According to Felten, the success factors for expansion are the entrepreneurial willingness to take risks, freedom for pioneers and a team that enjoys taking on special challenges. More than ten percent of the turnover is now generated in international business.*

Expanding horizons with passion

For 60 years, FERCHAU has been employing pioneers who explore and develop unchartered territory; for over 20 years, this has included operations abroad. Always with a great deal of commitment, for good reasons and with a realistic view of what is feasible. Because the expansion in Europe is not an end in itself, but an answer to many strategic questions – yesterday, today and even more so in the future.

Harald Felten feels at home throughout Europe – and was delighted to initiate the establishment of the first foreign subsidiary a good 20 years ago: FERCHAU France, near the Airbus headquarters in Toulouse. »This and many subsequent decisions secured us an excellent position at the top of the service provider pyramid for decades«, recalls Felten, now Vice President FERCHAU International.

And in 2026? Today, FERCHAU has left visible footprints in the Spanish, British, Austrian, French and Polish markets. Over the course of 20 years, the »Team International« from the service, staff and operational areas has constantly expanded its horizons. With a turnover share of over ten percent, FERCHAU International has firmly established itself in foreign markets and the service and customer portfolio is growing continuously. »That's good for the whole company!«

The FERCHAU DNA: Passion and entrepreneurial spirit

The experience and contacts gained are now being used to efficiently open new locations abroad. Felten emphasises that employees' commitment is above all crucial for successful market entry. ***»Dedication, passion and imagination have been driving our development for 20 years and will continue to do so in the future.«***

In the meantime, Tobias Keuter has created a structured basis for expansion and sees himself as a bridge builder who combines the FERCHAU DNA of shared values, standards and processes with the diversity of local markets. For him, internationalisation means much more than nearshoring or offshoring: »It's about real collaboration across national borders.« In his view, a local presence, a strong international network and a plurality of ideas create added value that not only benefits individual locations, but also strengthens the entire company. ***»Our customers today expect integrated solutions, and that is exactly what we deliver by combining the strengths of all our country organisations.«***

The future: Scaling and new horizons

For Keuter, however, further internationalisation is not purely a business project with clearly defined milestones, »but an attitude of people with an entrepreneurial spirit who are able to create something new based on the FERCHAU DNA«. This attitude is particularly evident in the way cross-border cooperation is organised – as a joint European value proposition. »When local expertise, international networking and the courage to innovate come together, this creates added value for customers in all markets.«

According to Keuter, the logical next step is a modern, networked organisation: ***»We think European and act local.«*** The diversity of locations is not a side effect, but a driver of innovation. »It enables us to recognise trends at an early stage, reduces our dependence on local economic conditions and puts us in a position to optimally implement multinational projects for our customers.«

Harald Felten sees the convergence of regional structures at FERCHAU as a response to the global shift in power: ***»In a world where supply chains and talent are increasingly sought within Europe, our presence in other countries is essential for us.«*** In this respect, the journey is far from over; further foreign subsidiaries are planned. »We have developed the structures and processes for internationalisation so that the team can immediately set off for new markets of the future.«

From individual hiring to a tailor-made team

Project groups – when engineering rocks again

While traditional temporary employment provides the foundation, tailored project groups bring drive to the realisation of technical solutions. With the establishment of Project Management Offices (PMOs), FERCHAU is further enhancing the active management of these groups to achieve maximum excellence. The result: scalable expert teams that deliver project success regardless of industry and trade. COO Tiemo Meyer reports how FERCHAU is evolving into a solution partner and enabler of progress for its customers.

Despite the AI breakthrough, people are indispensable for technological progress. »For me, the SUPPORT business is the shining centre of the Milky Way, because everything here revolves around the employees«, says Tiemo Meyer, who heads the SUPPORT division at FERCHAU and has experienced and shaped all facets of expert procurement. ***»It was always important to me not just to manage, but to actively shape – this feeling of building up my own branches or structures as an intrapreneur in the company is exactly what drives me every day.«***

According to Meyer, the best example of change is the project group – »our top class«. Project groups are an ideal solution for enabling customers to ramp up teams of experts quickly and as required, regardless of trades such as construction, electrics or IT. One of the first project groups in Kiel developed circuit diagrams for vehicles, while other teams of experts worked in the shipbuilding and power generation sectors. »Today, we also provide support on various topics in the field of software development. This constant technical progress ensures that the task always remains exciting.«

Flexible, customised, compliant

Each project group is put together anew for the individual customer and purpose. FERCHAU has developed a methodology for awarding contracts in a legally compliant manner, combined with a sophisticated communication and reporting system: established and DEKRA-certified. In this way, the advantages of contracts for work and services can be combined with the compliant, indirect management of experts by the customer on site – within an operating model that relieves customers of the need to onboard external staff: »FERCHAU takes care of the breathing in and breathing out.«

Actively managed projects

Meyer is currently working on systematising and further developing the project groups with Project Management Offices (PMOs). After all, setting up a project group does not work at the push of a button because every project has its own requirements and two success factors: technical excellence and project excellence. According to Meyer, it is therefore important to be able to jointly define the process organisation and operate it effectively: ***»Our aim with the PMO is to quickly offer every customer a turnkey solution with active project management.«***

The future of temporary employment

Will project groups and digitalisation spell the end of temporary staffing and local sites? »Not at all«, says Meyer, »because we have continuously expanded our business in recent years.« The well-established recruitment of experts – one of FERCHAU's core competences – bridges the gap between the customer and technical progress by providing flexible capacity. The art of combining technology with people is crucial. ***»When we set up a turnkey team for a customer, it's like rock'n'roll: It has to have drive, the chemistry has to be right and, in the end, it's the performance on stage that counts.«***

Tiemo Meyer

has worked at FERCHAU for 20 years. *The chemical engineer from northern Germany discovered a passion for sales in the course of his career – self-taught in a DIY store. In his early positions at FERCHAU, he worked (»only with credit card, car and telephone«) in the development and management of branch offices: »Back then, many of my first employees were called 'Meyer'«. Today as* ***COO, he is responsible for SUPPORT*** *with over 5,500 employees in temporary staffing and project groups.*

Strategic partner for customers

Competence stimulates business

Thomas Hucht

*is the **COO for the COMPETENCE business** at FERCHAU. He oversees the strategic direction of the specialised business divisions Automotive, Aerospace & Defence (including RST) and planting. His focus is on developing holistic solutions that combine engineering excellence with global scalability and modern technologies such as AI.*

Agile, hybrid and taking global responsibility for the success of our customers: How FERCHAU creates real added value through its integrated solution approach in the automotive, aerospace, defence and process industries, explains Thomas Hucht. He heads the COMPETENCE division at FERCHAU, has been there since the early days and is making the organisation fit for the future.

FERCHAU was born on Hohe Straße in Gummersbach. Whatever you call it – a technical office, design office or engineering office: »That was the origin of our current COMPETENCE business«, reports Thomas Hucht, who now heads the division of the same name. The background: FERCHAU's interdisciplinary teams assume comprehensive responsibility for the customer's success, from requirements management to design and development to production-related support.

Hucht should know, because he has been involved in such projects his entire FERCHAU life, starting out as head of a technical office and the branch office in Bremen, before moving to the position of CTO at FERCHAU Aviation and subsequently to Managing Director of planting, the plant engineering specialist for the process industry. FERCHAU also had a Chief COMPETENCE Officer (CCO) in the past, which was of course also Hucht.

What drives him to make changes is the combination of market intuition and a pure passion for technology: ***»At FERCHAU, innovation arises from intensive dialogue with customers when we jointly discover that old processes are reaching their limits.«*** One of his first reference projects was with a construction machinery manufacturer from northern Germany, recalls Hucht: »The customer reported that costs were too high and engineering processes were too slow. Without further ado, we switched the entire development to 3D, which minimised design errors and massively accelerated production – I still have a few models of this excavator series in my office as a memento.«

Full-service solutions

Today, the mechanical engineer shoulders responsibility for large areas of the FERCHAU Group that take the COMPETENCE concept to the next level: Automotive, planting and Aerospace & Defence with Rostock System Technik RST, where complete solutions and end-to-end products for aerospace, shipbuilding and industry are developed. ***»In total, around 2,300 employees in Europe provide integrated full-service solutions for engineering and IT«***, says Hucht.

What counts is the integrated solution approach. The units pool industry-specific expertise in order to respond precisely to the requirements of companies. According to Hucht, the aim is to synchronise and harmonise the processes in the business divisions even better. Ultimately, the aim is to enable customers to act as quickly as their market demands.

Competence teams – hybrid and global

The COMPETENCE units' response to increasing cost pressure and technological complexity is a hybrid model that combines modern technology with global efficiency. ***»AI-supported generative design and automated testing ensure speed and quality.«*** Resources from Best Cost Countries (BCC) such as FERCHAU's offshore development centre in India are integrated according to the principle of »seamless engineering«, explains Hucht: »Local expertise and international capacities merge into a single unit in which control is centralised and implementation is cost-efficient.« The future is an agile organisation that combines high-end engineering in all technical disciplines with global competitiveness – without losing operational consistency.

In his private life, Hucht has set himself somewhat more down-to-earth goals: As a passionate DIY enthusiast with a »well-stocked« workshop, he not only builds garden furniture himself, but also finds his balance by working on a Zündapp ZL25. Together with his son, he maintains this piece of engineering history – a personal »back to the engineering roots«. When the machine was built over 40 years ago, the first PC version of AutoCAD had just come onto the market.

Christoph Sedlmeir

*As **COO of FERCHAU GmbH**, Christoph Sedlmeir is responsible for the Business Development and Contract divisions. As CEO of prime-ing GmbH, he also manages key strategic areas in Managed Service Providing (MSP) and Recruitment Process Outsourcing (RPO). In 2025, the organisation Staffing Industry Analysts (SIA) selected him for the prestigious »Staffing 100 Europe« list. As Chairman of APSCo OutSource Europe, he is also actively involved in shaping the future of international service standards.*

Thinking and acting innovatively

The evolution of the external workforce

At FERCHAU, innovation is not an end in itself, but arises from the direct connection to the market and the players. Hardly anyone embodies this spirit as consistently as Christoph Sedlmeir, who has been driving the transformation of the company for around two decades. His goal: to not only observe and accompany technological change, but to actively shape it.

Rooted in the operational base, equipped with a feel for digital potential: Early on, Christoph Sedlmeir provided targeted impetus to initiate FERCHAU's transformation into new markets such as IT. His credo: »Don't stew in your own juice, but look outside the company.« This drive to constantly question the status quo made him a pioneer for solutions that define the standard in the market today.

The rapid pace of transformation has put FERCHAU in a position to respond to the industry's constant pressure for change. At the same time, it is essential to ensure that customers receive the optimum solution for every requirement – whether through temporary employment, contracting, direct recruitment or contracts for work. ***»My aim is not to deliver experts even faster, but to optimise and orchestrate a customer's entire workforce so that it generates the maximum benefit.«***

Changing sides for maximum efficiency

A key milestone in his career came in 2018, when he took over as Managing Director of the FERCHAU subsidiary prime-ing. It was here that Sedlmeir made a strategic shift in perspective – moving away from the traditional role of sourcing individual experts towards that of a consultative service provider: »We bring our full core expertise in recruitment and people management to the customer's side.« prime-ing acts as an extended workbench for procurement and HR departments, orchestrating their entire external workforce. This gives customers a professional partner on their side – one that elevates collaboration with all market participants to a new level of quality.

Two growth areas take centre stage: firstly, the professional management and optimisation of external staffing providers through neutral vendor concepts (Managed Service Providing – MSP); and secondly, Recruitment Process Outsourcing (RPO), under which prime-ing takes responsibility for the entire permanent recruitment process – from needs analysis through to qualification interviews. To manage these complex processes in a legally compliant and efficient manner, Sedlmeir relied on in-house developments such as the relaX portal. What began as a compliance tool has evolved under his leadership into a digital platform that is set to use AI agents to optimise matching between requests and expert profiles.

Creating value through people

For Sedlmeir, digital transformation is about far more than the introduction of new software. For him, it is about industrialising processes while preserving the human element. ***»Personnel services are not about nuts and bolts – they are about people,«*** he emphasises. His ambition is to create genuine added value: »The intelligent interplay between platforms and in-house developments is the decisive lever for our future.«

Having successfully built up the divisions and positioned them on the market, Sedlmeir is now preparing the next strategic step: On 1 July 2026, he will hand over responsibility for MSP and RPO to his colleague Ben Fleige in order to transform FERCHAU's business with freelancers.

Strategic merger

A new dynamic in the freelance market

***Christoph Sedlmeir** is repositioning FERCHAU's freelance business. Through the integration of top itservices AG and a consistent digital platform strategy, a **powerful ecosystem for high-end IT** is emerging. At its core is the evolution from traditional contracting towards data-driven matchmaking between specialised experts and demanding customer projects.*

The realignment marked a milestone in FERCHAU's history: with the integration of top itservices AG into the CONTRACT division on 1 January 2026, the FERCHAU Group's freelance portfolio was significantly strengthened. Since mid-2025, Christoph Sedlmeir has also been responsible for the CONTRACT division; from July 2026, he will focus exclusively on the freelance business in order to unlock its full potential. ***»FERCHAU's decades of expertise in engineering and industry merge with top itservices' deep IT know-how and extensive network,«*** he says. The result is a seamless freelance offering that covers the full spectrum – from industrial software development through to highly specialised business IT for retail, banking and the public sector.

Technology as an enabler

For Sedlmeir, the further digitalisation of the freelance market is essential: »Efficiency in matching will be the decisive competitive advantage in the future.« At the heart of this development is the relaX platform, whose creation Sedlmeir originally initiated himself. He is now working on the next iteration to develop relaX from a portal into a marketplace, »because digital marketplaces will significantly change our business field of freelance experts«. Given that customers, candidates and freelancers alike are digital natives, this offering represents a major step towards the future. The initiative is being realised through an AI-based platform architecture that synchronises technological requirements with the appropriate high-end skills.

With over 130,000 registered freelancers, FERCHAU has one of the strongest freelance communities in Europe. »While we were historically closely involved in our customers' product development, we are now deeply embedded in their core corporate IT departments through our freelance division,« Sedlmeir emphasises.

The business IT mindset perfectly complements FERCHAU's traditional footprint, while an optimised user experience helps minimise administrative friction on all sides. ***»We use technology to reduce administrative friction, accelerate the perfect match and create space for what really matters – project work itself.«***

A focused personality

Within FERCHAU, Sedlmeir is regarded as an analytical leader with a strong sense of responsibility and a clear ability to communicate vision. The pace of transformation earned him international recognition in 2025, when he was named on the »Staffing 100 Europe« list. By concentrating on the freelance business, Sedlmeir is addressing one of the central challenges of the modern market: providing highly flexible specialist expertise from a strategic hub for high-end contracting. His consistent forward-looking approach is aimed at answering a key question: how will we generate revenue tomorrow? For him, the emphasis is above all on execution: ***»At FERCHAU, our ambition is not just to want something – but to make it happen.«*** ■

Markets, courage and people

Staying committed in the winds of change

Alexander Schulz

has been CEO of FERCHAU since early 2025. *Prior to this, he spent more than 25 years building his career within the company, including leadership roles at branch and sales region level. From 2016 to 2024, the »technology enthusiast« served as COO of FERCHAU. Schulz studied aerospace engineering as well as industrial engineering.*

As CEO of FERCHAU, Alexander Schulz fosters a strong team spirit – because the wide-ranging changes ahead can only be mastered together. A culture of ownership and openness to new ideas lays the foundation for FERCHAU to continue shaping markets driven by technological progress, with flexible solutions and the right experts. In the interview, Schulz explains how he is harnessing the winds of change to achieve his goals.

You took over from Frank Ferchau as CEO at the beginning of 2025. What have you experienced since then?

SCHULZ: The focus of the transformation was on the new structure of the FERCHAU Group. Looking back, it seems to me that the setup has always been like this, despite new managers, reporting lines, boards and processes. This means that we have made the right adjustments. At its core, FERCHAU is about focus and proximity to the customer in order to jointly bring to life holistic solution expertise for all market requirements.

Where do you set different priorities than Frank Ferchau?

SCHULZ: The biggest difference is probably that the company doesn't have the same name as me (laughs). Like many family businesses, FERCHAU was strongly focussed on the shareholder. I am working on transferring responsibility in the management structure more consistently to employees so that each area can be optimally organised. I see myself as a bridge builder and enabler who unleashes the potential of my colleagues. This enables us to utilise the creativity, inventiveness and problem-solving skills of our employees to a greater extent. My ultimate goal is to make customers successful.

»The future of technical services is international and tailored to individual requirements.«

2025 was challenging. How did you personally find your first year as CEO?
SCHULZ: I was born with a great deal of optimism and am not easily rattled. And I have learned not to put off tasks – the bigger the problem, the more I get involved. On the one hand, this allows me to maintain an overview and, on the other, it gives me the certainty that we have the issues under control together.

You hold a pilot's licence – a skill that seems to fit well with the high-level perspective of a CEO. What do the two roles have in common?
SCHULZ: Pilots and CEOs both need sound planning, a checklist, a cockpit with all the relevant information, and a clear plan for navigation. Nothing can be left to chance, and you have to fly the journey all the way to the end – you can't simply pull over for a short break. Gliding, in particular, has taught me to remain optimistic about the next updraft. If one area isn't performing, there will be another where new energy is released for take-off. To recognise that, you have to learn how to harness the winds of change.

Speaking of updraft: What is your forecast for the economy in the coming years?
SCHULZ: I am convinced that many companies have now had enough of stagnation and are working hard to bring innovative services and new solutions to the market. This includes the energy and defence sectors, but also trade, banking and insurance as well as life sciences and the IT sector. It is precisely these companies that want to make a difference and shape things that we will address in order to drive the transformation forward together. I am confident that we will steer FERCHAU into the growth areas in 2026 and accelerate our customers' progress there together.

How do customers benefit from FERCHAU's sharper focus?
SCHULZ: Through restructuring, we are operating as an organisation in a far more agile and targeted way, enabling us to respond to customers' individual needs more effectively. This allows each area to play to its specific strengths. Companies always gain access to specialists who work with them to develop the optimal solution for their requirements. For large customers, it is natural that different services are delivered by different experts. Smaller companies, by contrast, are sometimes used to having a single point of contact – here, we need to clearly communicate the advantages of our approach. Either way, the customer always receives the best possible package.

What added value does FERCHAU bring to key trend topics such as AI, energy, infrastructure and defence?
SCHULZ: I firmly believe that every risk also presents an opportunity – you just have to look for it. Developments do not happen overnight, such as established markets like automotive facing challenges. However, over the past six decades, one of FERCHAU's core strengths has clearly emerged: flexibility across industries, technologies and cooperation models. Our teams are able to build bridges between different industrial sectors, which in turn makes us attractive to customers, employees and new talent. In response to this diverse landscape, we have developed a broad portfolio that today not only covers expertise in vehicles, national infrastructure and energy networks, but naturally also includes specialists in IT and AI.

What role does FERCHAU play in shaping the further development of technical services?
SCHULZ: My goal is for our services to be recognised more strongly as those of a holistic solution provider that supports customers across a wide range of tasks – sometimes as a supplier, sometimes as a neutral adviser for managed services, or as a recruitment partner. In addition, FERCHAU is pursuing a consistent internationalisation strategy. This also includes best-cost country regions such as Eastern Europe and India, from which we can offer efficient solutions via our own locations or partners. Focusing on a single technology, market or industry is a dead end today. The future of technical services is international and tailored to individual requirements.

What terms do you use to define the corporate culture to ensure that FERCHAU will still be operating successfully in ten years' time?
SCHULZ: I strive for a culture of ownership – that is personally very important to me. As intrapreneurs, employees should view their role and the company as if it were their own. Secondly, openness is crucial so that we proactively engage with new sectors, technologies and challenges. And finally, our success depends very much on reliability. As a service provider, we must fulfil our responsibilities and keep our promises – and we take full responsibility for doing so.

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