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INTERVIEW
What Hettich Holding GmbH & Co. oHG says about GOBENCH

Technical assessment seen through the eyes of the customer

Why Hettich employs database-aided benchmarking



Oliver Schael - Head of System Development and Standardisation

Kirchlengern / Lippstadt. The road to successful benchmarking essentially consists in developers, technicians and engineers "taking off their professional blinkers" to see things through the eyes of the customer. That is how the process at Hettich can be described. Hettich, a family-owned business headquartered in the German town of Kirchlengern, manufactures furniture fittings. These include drawer and runner kits, hinges and hardware for folding and sliding doors. The company has a 125-year history and, with more than 6000 employees, is one of the world's leading and most innovative enterprises in the industry.

Hettich employs benchmarking as a driving force for innovation and inspiration. The product range covers up to 35,000 items. Many of their own components are analyzed and compared with the products of international competitors. This is where INDEC's GOBENCH IQ system comes into its own.

Oliver Schael, Director Systems Development and Standardization, is responsible for orientation of the company's competitor analysis: "It's not really about what you've got and what you want. It's rather more about whether you understand what the customer, the user, wants to know." In practical terms this means that systematic benchmarking is successful if you make comparisons between the correct product categories. In this context "correct" means categories that are relevant to the customer. After all, for the user of a drawer runner or hinge system the significance attached to ease of installation differs markedly from mechanical durability – and can be far more important, especially when the various perspectives are taken into account: industrial customer, cabinet maker or even end consumer, for whom ease of installation is surely less important. The precise service life (e.g. 100,000 cycles) as determined in the laboratory may be a key design criterion, but is less appreciable in use than the subjectively perceived running quality. The consumer only wants the system to operate smoothly and silently, to be easy to remove and clean, and to last for the life of the piece of furniture itself.

"Developers do not necessarily give adequate consideration to these user categories. That's something we have recognized at Hettich and the appropriate paradigm shift was our greatest challenge," commented Schael. Himself an engineer, he continued: "An engineer is a perfectionist and self-critical by nature. He always looks for the best solution, often with a technical bias. Conflicts occur when the actual use is different from and at variance with the technical definition." He considers these problems to escalate in significance as the level of innovation rises and as the user profile and product utilization become more varied.

Consequently it can easily happen that the engineering solution is not the best one, perhaps because the user has different expectations, or because the apparently so successful external product solution harbors some serious weaknesses. Schael: "The all-singing, all-dancing product simply does not exist."

The comparison with the parts available on the market and their functions, coupled with the views of the person who takes the decision for or against a product, opens up new motivating perspectives in terms of the evaluation and embodiment of innovations.

This is where a system such as GOBENCH IQ supports the analytical process. A systematic comparison, including of subjective features, increases appreciation of the "real" criteria and objectifies the image of products. The self-evident strength of the system is that it communicates an overall picture, which also means that the various weaknesses of a product can be identified. Schael: "As a result a few products currently on the market might lose their appeal. But conversely, functions that had been rated quite differently, now gain in significance."

Before Hettich switched to GOBENCH, the company had developed its own database solutions – with the expected imponderables: the systems were not decentrally accessible, the data structure was heterogeneous and data islands featured largely, while maintenance and further development were limited. The search for an external solution led the company to INDEC with GOBENCH IQ as the only supplier who met all of Hettich's requirements. Hettich has now been using the system successfully since 2012. Even though Oliver Schael describes its implementation as challenging, he also regards it as a success, thanks to good cooperation within the project team. "Since we have a decentralized set-up, some units worked faster and presented their results earlier than others. This in turn spurred on the other co-workers and created a bandwagon effect. Of course, that is a very pleasing result when it comes to implementing a system such as this one."

Although much of the basic data still remains to be captured, the system is already of enormous benefit because the data source is much wider than before. Schael: "We know from experience that without such a system we would only ever look at the products of one or just a few competitors. We now have a direct comparison with 100 competitors."

GOBENCH IQ makes the information available with just a few mouse clicks, it serves as a basis for documentation and also helps to identify how long a competitor would require, given that company's current developments, to reach the same standard as Hettich. As regards the costs, benefits, efficiency and effectiveness of competitor analysis, Hettich's view is that it is difficult to put a figure on the value of information: if you have the information, it is no longer worth anything; if you do not have the information, its value is immense. And if you have too much data (not to be confused with information), the value is negative.

One thing is clear: Hettich will continue to expand its database-aided benchmarking, it will cover peripheral products as well, and it will improve the precision of its development activities with the system's help. The ultimate goal, after all, is to let the internal user see the product with the eyes of the end user, to research user categories and to strengthen the company's own sales efforts with the answers that have been obtained.

About Hettich

Hettich is one of the world's largest manufacturers of furniture fittings. Day after day more than 6,000 employees rise to the challenge of developing intelligent technology for furniture. Hettich is a family-owned business and based in the German town of Kirchleugern. The company also has 38 subsidiaries worldwide and around 100 agencies across the globe. In 2012 Hettich achieved a turnover of 857 Mio.

www.hettich.com

About INDEC

INDEC has been developing competitor-analysis systems and processes worldwide since 1998. The GOBENCH IQ system developed by INDEC provides management with competitive analyses for locations, products, services, processes, patents, organizational structures, employees and capital investment. GOBENCH facilitates complex decision-making in matters of product development, location analysis and any issues that involve precision, structure and transparency within the scope of competitor analysis.

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