

Operating From a Position of Strength

Wittur CEO Antoine Doutriaux discusses his new role, company goals.

by Angela C. Baldwin

Doutriaux discussed Wittur's future goals during a wide-ranging interview with EW.



During a busy day at Interlift 2019, ELEVATOR WORLD had the chance to meet and interview Wittur CEO Antoine Doutriaux (AD). At the time of the meeting, Doutriaux had been with the company a little more than 18 months, and it was his first Interlift. The experience was proving enlightening for him, as he said it highlighted the scope of the industry, as well as Wittur's place in it. He and your author (AB) were able to talk about the Interlift experience, as well as what led Doutriaux to the vertical transportation (VT) industry nearly two years ago and Wittur's goals moving forward.

AB: Can you tell me a little bit about your personal background?

AD: Absolutely. I am from northern France and have moved around a few places in France and then around Europe. And, today, I live in Munich. The Wittur office is about 30 minutes from Munich, so I moved there with my wife a little more than a year ago.

AB: Tell me about your professional background and how you ultimately entered the elevator industry.

AD: I have always worked in industry with a focus on technology, specializing in job-specific products. I spent six years in the defense industry, working with submarines, and 13 years in the automotive industry. Then, I spent some time in the aerospace industry before I joined Wittur, which was a great opportunity that I gladly accepted. So, I am new to the elevator industry compared to many people, being in it slightly less than two years now. It is definitely a very interesting, very exciting business.

AB: What do you think of your first Interlift experience so far, particularly the Wittur CUBE?

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AD: The CUBE is a great place to be. My understanding is the floor is even better attended than last Interlift. Effectively, it is very convenient for visitors to go to the CUBE. It is a very central place, and we have a lot of visitors going from one hall to another through our CUBE. We have a lot of space to display our products, including doors, cabs, drives and safeties, and we have our innovation area this year. So, it is really working for us.

It's a great opportunity and place to interact with customers in a limited time and space. As this is my first Interlift, I can also spend some time visiting with partners. What is impressive is the size of the event and the number of players. And, it's a business where people know each other quickly and well. So, the discussions are going very fast. Great show, great fair.

AB: When you joined Wittur, what were some of your initial goals for the company under your direction?

AD: What I think was an important factor in my joining Wittur was that Wittur enjoys a very nice position in the market. We have a good position in the door business. This is a fantastic position from which to build. My objective has been, and continues to be, to grow the company and its profitability, and to make Wittur a great company for our customers. And, thus far, I am pleased.

There are a lot of opportunities to further develop Wittur. There are opportunities in the market. There are opportunities in innovation. You have seen in the booth that innovation is a key driver in our presentation at Interlift 2019. We are innovating to make our customers more successful, which is really our objective. It is also important for our employees. We need to offer them a great place to work in exchange for their long-term commitment, so, overall, Wittur can be a success. The company started off from a great position. But, our hopes are that Wittur becomes the best player and the supplier of choice for all of our customers, whether they are large international companies or smaller, more localized companies.

AB: What is your perspective of the industry now?

AD: This is an industry similar to others in which I have worked, in that it has a lot of content. There is a lot of added value you can bring to the customer through innovation and digitalization, and this is key. This is a strong trend. So, there were no major surprises joining this industry. It met my expectation when I joined Wittur.

AB: Digitalization and cybersecurity are very big topics in the industry right now. Is Wittur also focused on these issues?

AD: Yes. We are bringing innovative and new products to the market, like those we showed in our CUBE's innovation area, including digital safeties and a line of doors and much more. There is no one product we are working on with regards to digitalization, but many. And, all aim to improve function and performance. You will see a step into the digital world to improve performance and improve the service for our customers. This is definitely a strong trend that started some time ago, and it will extend into the future.

AB: Is Wittur looking to enter any new markets or strengthen itself in certain markets?

AD: In our strategy, we definitely want to continue to grow organically. Growing organically is also the proof of success. It proves that you are innovating where you need to, that you have made the right choice, and that you are performing. So, this is definitely one major direction of our strategy. We also think it's best to go fast, to answer better and faster. To be able to do this, it will make sense to complete our portfolio by making appropriate acquisitions. This is also part of our strategy. It is early to talk definitively about some of what we are working on, because many things can happen, but it is definitely part of our strategy.

We have some business going on in Africa, and we do see this as a place of growth. It is also not a secret to say we feel too small in North America. This is a market that is very important and very interesting for us, and we think we can do better in North America.

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AB: As a global company, working in many parts of the world, business gets affected by the political and economic climates of the countries in which you are doing business. How does Wittur navigate those challenges?

AD: First, there are many things happening in the world, and in politics, which can have a major impact on the global economy, in general. A topic we are watching is the overall economy. The main thing is we want to be Chinese in China, American in America and European in Europe. We are producing close to our customers, so we do not have huge material flows between the regions, which protects us from tariff wars, for instance. This is good news. Effectively, we will see how things evolve in the coming years. In general, so far, we do not feel particularly exposed or more exposed than the average company in our industry. And, the good news about the elevator industry is that we are more resilient than other industries. What we have seen in 2019 is business going pretty well, especially when compared to my former colleagues in the automotive industry, which is suffering.

AB: Will you be attending many trade fairs in 2020 and then Interlift again in 2021, exhibiting in the CUBE?

AD: Our next shows will be the International Elevator and Escalator Expo in Mumbai and the World Elevator and Escalator Expo in Shanghai. We will be in Dubai in the fall for The Elevator Show and back in India in November for the International Sourcing Exposition for Elevators and Escalators. The strength of Wittur is being able to meet our customers where they are. We are in many parts of the world, and we can be at these events.

Interlift is not purely European. There are many customers, and that is a good thing for us being global. The benefits of the CUBE are the space and the opportunity to meet the customer. It is a nice place to be, considering our size and our portfolio. So, for me, it would make sense that we do it again.

AB: Tell me a little bit about your family life and hobbies.

AD: My wife and I have five children. They are adults, and the youngest are university students. They are not with us in Munich. They are now living in France and Africa. So, my wife and I are free to explore Bavaria, which is a really nice place. There is hiking and sailing in the summertime. We are enjoying the Alps and the lakes. We are enjoying it very much.

AB: What are your future career plans?

AD: To stay at Wittur is the plan. I think you need to stay someplace long term to have an impact on the organization. So, I have no other career plan. My plan is to stay at Wittur, to grow Wittur into the best company in the business.

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Wittur CEO Antoine Doutriaux in the Wittur CUBE during Interlift 2019.