

# New forms of work, not only in China

Lunch, meetings, small talk, or a coffee break: rituals that were a matter of course a short while ago. Now, more and more people are working from home. So what is the best way to communicate "offstage"? Jochen Scheil, Managing Director Uhlmann China, reports on how he and his staff members remain in contact and serve customers during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how everyone is coming to value the new forms of communication.



**Mr. Scheil, how are you and Uhlmann China dealing with the COVID-19 situation?**

**Jochen Scheil:** Uhlmann China started to implement home-based work and reduced office attendance on February 10. I myself have been in Germany with my family since the end of January. We were on a private visit. Due to the developments in China at that time, we decided to stay in Germany for the time being. My staff initially had difficulties returning to Shanghai and Beijing after the New Year vacation, but they are all now back home. Several of them are working from there, while others may go to the office upon prior approval, but only as required by the work schedule.

This work schedule is reviewed by the management team on a weekly basis. In China, we are used to organizing our work using digital tools such as WeChat, which is similar to WhatsApp. We also use such tools to communicate with colleagues and our customers. Consequently, it was not difficult for us to integrate them into our daily routine when we started to implement home-based work schedules. The only things we sometimes miss are small talk in the office with colleagues over a coffee or tea, and our "real" face time with colleagues and customers.

**“ Our employees as well as our customers value our efforts to maintain business as efficiently as possible in these difficult times.**

However, staff members and customers value the efforts to maintain business to the best of our ability. They fully support the measures taken by the company as well as those implemented by the local communities, for example, temperature checks, monitoring of whereabouts, or the restriction of social contact, to name just a few.

**What measures have you implemented at Uhlmann China and when?**

**Jochen Scheil:** We first extended the Chinese New Year vacation by a week. A return to work was originally planned for February 1, but the Chinese government decided to extend the public break until February 9.

Due to the severe developments, the government encouraged all companies to implement various work schemes, such as working from home or staggered hours



Appointed Managing Director/Regional Director Uhlmann China in 2010, Jochen Scheil is currently working from home or the Uhlmann headquarters in Laupheim.

“ Although an unaccustomed step, digital forms of communication are currently just the right tools to help protect us all while remaining in close contact.

in the office so fewer employees are present at one time. Uhlmann China has been using home-based work since then.

Furthermore, the management team reviews the work schedule for staggered hours in the office on a weekly basis. We use phone calls, e-mails, WeChat, and MS Teams – an excellent tool for communication and to exchange documents – to remain in touch with each other and our customers. After the extended vacation and 14-day quarantine for employees who traveled within China over the Chinese New Year, people have returned to their workplaces and our customers are resuming operation. Naturally, we have intensified hygiene measures in the offices. Hand disinfectant and medical face masks are available to all employees to ensure personal safety.

**What experience has been gained from home-based work, reduced office time, travel restrictions, etc.?**

**Jochen Scheil:** The feedback on working from home is thoroughly positive. Our thanks go to Uhlmann IT in Germany at this point. They provided remote access for those employees who do not usually work from home. Our staff members highly appreciate the fact that we offer such a working model. The management team has worked out a specific work schedule for those who have to be in the office to handle spare parts shipments for customers, for example.

At the same time, we are naturally adhering to the official rules and regulations that apply to the Uhlmann China offices in Shanghai and Beijing. Travel restrictions within China and overseas remain in place and will be adjusted according to the latest advice from local authorities. As travel restrictions continue to apply for German technicians, our local customer support team has meanwhile successfully completed installation and SAT for a customer in Shanghai. This demonstrates the benefit of our “local for local” approach, particularly in such challenging times. The remote support through colleagues at the head-

quarters in Laupheim was excellent. I thank everyone – in China and Germany – for their hard work to make this premiere successful.

**What advice do you have for all those currently working from home?**

**Jochen Scheil:** Primarily, adopt and embrace such new working models. Make use of the available communication tools to allow qualitative remote work processes and establish communication routines with your team, colleagues, and customers. This will help us all greatly until the situation returns to normal. I am certain that those now familiar with such forms of work will also gain positively from them in the future. Finally, two tips to make work across distances more personal. Use the messenger tool to wish your counterpart “Good morning” and say “Have a nice evening”. Also establish informal groups to chat about all sorts of things – a substitute for small talk otherwise exchanged on the way for a coffee or tea.

close-up online

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