

Issue 1|2020

The first days after  
the shutdown

Adjustment of  
production capacities

Everyday sales and  
office life

FORSTER **FF**

# aktuell

The magazine for staff and business partners of the Forster Group



**Safe through  
uncertain times ...**

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## AT FIRST HAND

*Dear Friends,  
Dear Staff Members,*

You are holding an unplanned issue of “Forster Aktuell” in your hands. While usually presenting interesting projects, innovative products and solutions for our customers in our company newspaper, this time we want to put the focus on our staff members. After all, they have managed to deliver an outstanding work performance under the difficult circumstances of the last few weeks.

Maintaining a regular working life under the conditions of Covid-19 presented us all with great challenges. The question of how we can

best protect ourselves and those close to us was naturally at the heart of our decision making.

### We say thank you!

This is the most important message to both our management and our staff members: Thank you for your entrepreneurial actions, your tireless efforts and your loyalty in the sense and for the good of our family business. Special thanks also go to our crisis management team, which steered the entire Forster Group through this special situation.

This was handled through quick decision making and implementation as well as constant monitoring of all measures, which were always made in consultation with our occupational physician.

This focus on health aspects became even more noticeable during the Corona crisis than in our everyday operations.

It goes without saying that the increased safety and hygiene standards in administration and production continue to be in force.

We would also like to thank our customers, who have remained loyal to us in these difficult times and have supported us consistently with orders and project management, as much as it was possible for each and everyone.

Another thank you goes to our suppliers: Forster hardly noticed any delivery problems due to border closures. We had stocked enough raw materials in the warehouses and the deliveries worked practically without interruption.

So far, we have managed to go through this difficult situation together quite safely. Of course, we do not know whether new complications will arise in the course of the Corona crisis. However, if we continue to work with the same enthusiasm and cohesion, our company will be well prepared and we can positively look into the future.

## WE SAY

# THANK YOU!

**to all our staff members and  
business partners of the  
Forster Group.**



Christian Forster

## Diversity is our strength!

Our company is known for a rather unusually diverse range of products, ranging from the traditional traffic engineering, advertising systems, industrial screen printing and signage, to shelving systems and noise control. These various pillars helped us considerably in the Covid-19 crisis, as the divisions, which operated almost without restrictions, were able to at least partially compensate for the declines in the more severely affected ones.

As a family-run medium-sized company with around 700 employees, carrying out responsible and sustainable action as well as social responsibility is of particular importance for us. Therefore, we are proud that we did not have to carry out a single "situation-related termination" and made only very limited use of the option of short-time working.

Right at the beginning of the year we were one of the first companies in Europe to introduce a sustainability management system in accordance with ONR 192500. We will report more about this sys-

tem, which is based on ISO 26000 (Guidance on social responsibility), in the next and hopefully "normal" Forster-Aktuell.

The Covid-19-related postponement of the summer celebrations 2020 into the next year was also not easy for us. Postponed is not abandoned - and we will celebrate our summer party together again in 2021 (we will announce the exact date in spring next year)!

Finally, I would like to mention the expansion of the management team at Forster Austria. Besides the previous managing directors Robert Reichartzeder and Hans-Peter Prüller, Andreas Grader was appointed to the management. From the 1st June of 2020, he will be, among others, responsible for the areas of technology and production.

A particularly beautiful season for me is just around the corner. The summer of 2020 will be remembered differently, but we will be able to enjoy it - fortunately also this year there will be many opportunities to do so. I wish you and your families a relaxing summer holiday season!

Yours,

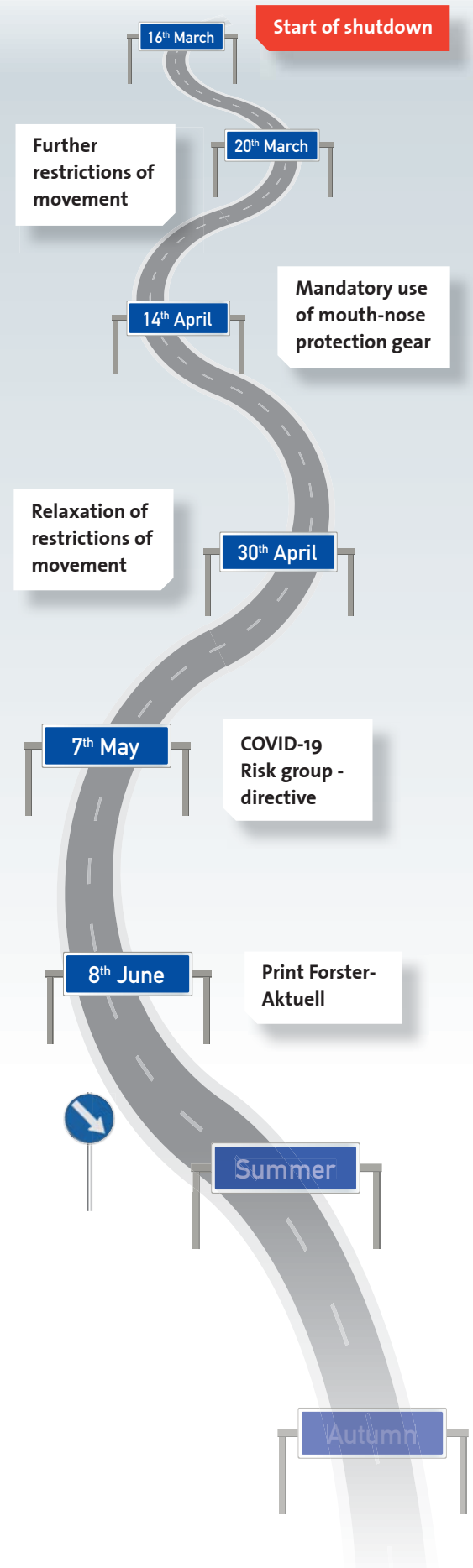
Christian Forster  
on behalf of the Forster family

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#### COVID-19: MEASURES AND PROCEDURES AT FORSTER

# The Forster-Group has shown its outstanding work

**Whoever has a leading position in these times is faced with a lot of pressing questions. These are questions that must be answered if you want to lead your company safely through these turbulent times. Forster Aktuell posed these questions to the management of Forster Austria.**

#### Andreas Grader



“In the first days after the shutdown, the focus was on the ongoing evaluation of the status quo with regard to health and the assessment of the effects on the individual production chains. Apart from the economic aspect, we focused on the processes of the various production lines and on the organisation in general. In all our considerations, the health of our employees has

always been our top priority. One of the main challenges for Forster as a manufacturing company was to find the right balance to slow down the processes of the individual production chains (to stop in the worst case) and to recognize the right time to “accelerate” production again. This did not only affect production, but also the implementation of infrastructure projects in particular. Through the flexibility of our staff members and with the use of different communication channels such as video conferencing, it was also possible to avoid a standstill here.”

#### Hans-Peter Prüller



“As a result of the sudden events in mid-March, we quickly realised that we would have to take

appropriate precautions and take suitable measures for our company. The individual measures were communicated via our available and proven information channels (including Forster *iiinform*, posters, and department meetings) and implemented rapidly. Our IT department masterfully secured the respective infrastructure in order to maintain our capacity to act and we could avoid a digital crash. Furthermore, we had to analyse the different scenarios that could have an impact on the current fiscal year. Fortunately, it was possible to quickly establish clarity here with our customers from the different sectors and countries. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our customers for the many understanding conversations and their support.”



### Robert Reichartzeder



“Despite this certainly very negative situation for everyone, it was impressive how the entire Team Forster can overcome such difficult times together. We are absolutely aware that the crisis is not over yet, but it is impressive how close all our companies and their employees have moved closer together. Of course you always need a little bit of luck, but I think we have also deserved it. We have certainly demanded a high degree of understanding and trust of our employees. Especially because of this trust it was possible to act efficiently and in the interest of our company. The high level of acceptance and the extremely rapid implementation of the first short-time working at Forster was supported by everyone, as was every other, sometimes specially required, solution that was needed in this extraordinary time. In this way, we at Forster were able to jointly avoid excessive reactions such as plant closures. Therefore, special thanks go to all staff members for their positive attitudes.”

## 2020: A YEAR TO REMEMBER

# Two turbulent months

The Covid-19 virus reached Europe at the beginning of 2020 and thus also strongly attacked the European economy. Our subsidiaries were also affected by government measures in the respective countries. Forster Aktuell asked the managing directors of our subsidiaries which events in particular will remain in their memories for many years to come.

**Forster Aktuell: What was the most striking event that you will remember from these unusual times?**



### ARBITEC FORSTER GMBH

“The situation in Germany was and is very different due to the strong federalism. On the whole, however, it can be said that the activities at Arbitec-Forster did not have to be drastically reduced. For example, project assemblies could fortunately be carried out as planned. We hope that also in the future nothing will change dramatically.” – **Rudolf Hackl**



### FORSTER ARCHIV- UND VERKEHRSTECHNIK GMBH

“At Forster Archiv & Verkehrstechnik we adapted very quickly to the new circumstances. After all, we are a relatively small and flexible team that has worked very closely together and we have always been and will always be there for our business partners.” – **Moses Thomas**



### COLBERG & FORSTER GMBH

“Colberg & Forster has a relatively wide range of services despite its size. This has certainly helped us during the difficult times. Of course we also felt the Covid-19 effects. But we are sure that the economy in Germany will be supported accordingly. With the help of this economic stimulus package and as part of the “Forster Family”, we enter the new fiscal year with confidence.” – **Siegfried Colberg**



### FORSTER ARCHÍVNA A DOPRAVNÁ TECHNIKA S.R.O

“Despite the certainly difficult time, it was possible to prepare an important noise protection project for Forster Slovakia and to even start its construction. This was made possible on the one hand with the help of our customer and our partners in Slovakia and on the other hand by the good cooperation with all project participants at Forster Austria.” – **Viktor Běreš**



### SAFETYCAR

“Of course the “shutdown” in Austria hit us hard! Safetycar is very happy to be a part of the Forster Group. Fortunately, things have been picking up again in recent weeks and the team is fully motivated for the future.” – **Dominik Forster**



### SAMODEF-FORSTER SARL

“As is well known, France is one of the worst affected countries in Europe. Assembly work was stopped overnight in mid-March, transports on the road had to be diverted and the goods stored. Thanks to the good cooperation with customers, forwarding agents and installation companies, this has also been achieved in a very short time. In the meantime, the situation in France has improved and with the support of the specialist departments from Austria, Samodef-Forster was able to “boot up” the system again. Also the Forster subsidiary in France looks very positively into the future.” – **Sébastien Evariste**

HOW COVID-19 CHANGED OUR DAILY WORK ROUTINE

# Individuality and flexibility were in high demand

The government had to take rigorous measures recently, which have naturally been implemented at Forster. Especially in such difficult times, it is a challenge to unwind the usual workload in a calm and relaxed manner. Forster Aktuell has asked the various departments how this worked out in detail at Forster.

“Right at the beginning of the COVID pandemic, the management of the Forster Group took all measures in the interest of the employees and health protection. As usual, the health of our employees was our top priority. As an occupational physician, I was regularly consulted in an advisory function in the crisis management.”

**Dr. Silvia Draxler, occupational physician**

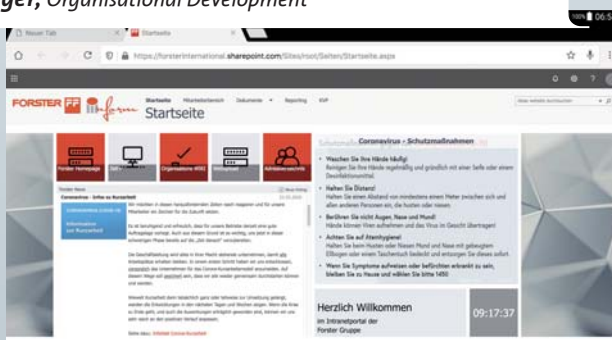
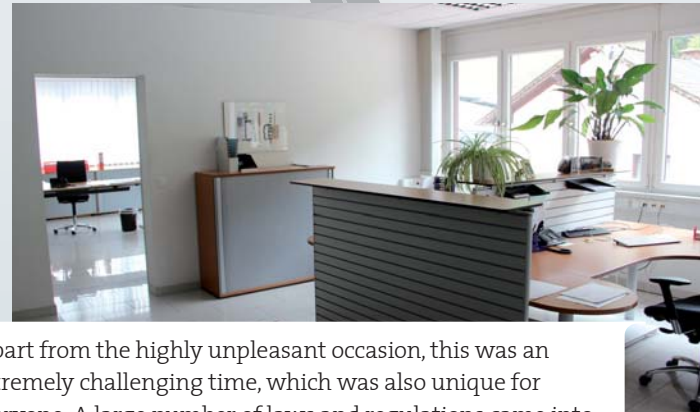


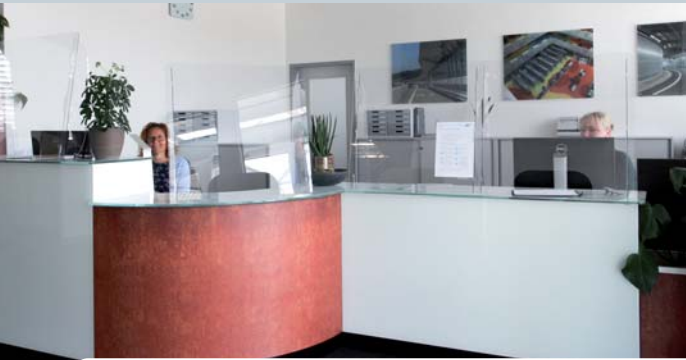
“For communicating the changes that were necessary in this special situation with regard to behaviour, protective measures or even working from home, the SharePoint Portal Forster iinform in particular, in addition to posting and e-mailing, has proven to be our internal information hub. The processes handled digitally via iinform (e.g. employee area, Continual Improvement Process CIP) and the deposited documents (e.g. marketing, reporting) are the right approach for the future, this has become particularly clear in recent months.”

**Paul Steger, Organisational Development**

“Apart from the highly unpleasant occasion, this was an extremely challenging time, which was also unique for everyone. A large number of laws and regulations came into force within a very short period of time, while there was little concrete information about them. As part of our crisis management team, it was also my task to implement the new requirements in our company in the best possible way.”

**Silvia Killinger, Law & Public Authorities**





“At Forster, short-time work was registered for the first time in the company’s more than 60-year long history. To me personally, it is important to note here that all employees up to the management level agreed to it. Fortunately, we have so far only had to apply the short-time working system to a very limited extent.”

**Hermann Wührer, Human Resources**



“This time was a great challenge! We had to reduce the assembly capacity to 0% within a few hours and then increase it again to 150% within a few days. This balance act was only possible thanks to our employees - they are already used to flexibility.”

**Walter Berger, Installation**



**Registration short-time working Forster / subsidiaries**

**Use of the tool video-conferencing**

**First assembly after the shutdown in Austria**



“From the point of view of the IT department, this period will go down in the history books as the accelerator of digitisation. Within two days and with the enormous commitment of the entire team, the workplace of more than 120 employees of the Forster Group was moved from their office desks in the company to their homes. Fast Internet lines, modern firewall solutions, cloud connections and video conferencing solutions that already existed before the shutdown, made this rapid implementation possible.”

**IT-Department**

“For procurement, it was clearly visible that the largely regionally limited and thus sustainable purchasing was a great help during this time. With the help of our partners, it was even possible to obtain the necessary material from severely affected regions. Of course, some extraordinary situations had to be mastered. Fortunately, there was understanding and support from all sides, both in-house and from our suppliers.”

**Karl Schoisswohl, Procurement**





“An essential point was and is that the employees have implemented the guidelines regarding “social distancing” and “hygiene regulations” set by the company in an exemplary manner. Thanks to the willingness and high commitment of all employees, it was possible to maintain production output in all areas at approximately the same level as in “before Corona times”. This enabled us to guarantee the delivery capability to our customers at all times.”

**Günther Plank**, Production Waidhofen/Ybbs



“In the course of the appearance of Covid-19 in Austria, extraordinary measures and rules of conduct found their way into our everyday business. Distancing rules, hygiene regulations, disinfectants and protective masks shape/shaped the daily routine in the company. In the course of ever new regulations and hygiene rules, new protection systems were developed and implemented, ranging from single pieces to large series in record time.”

**Günther Bachbauer**, Production Waidhofen/Ybbs



#### Adaptation of production capacities



#### Subsidiaries inform about construction stops of current projects



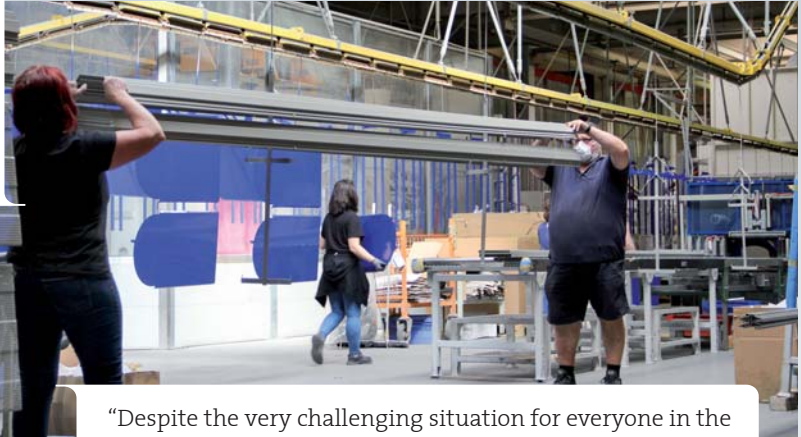
“Several of our project schedules were cancelled due to construction stops and presented our project managers with additional challenges. The already requested assembly teams and the ordered means of transport, cranes, lifting platforms, safeguards, as well as the time agreements with the motorway maintenance and police departments had to be cancelled or postponed at short notice and as cost-effectively as possible.”

**Markus Fehringer**, Engineering Dept./Projects



“In production planning, we had to adjust to the short-term loss of resources in production due to the reduced attendance times of employees. Our new PPS software (Power BI) is an important tool to keep an overview of the many production areas in such a situation and to be able to react accordingly. I was impressed by the discipline, the cohesion and the positive attitude of the staff despite the critical circumstances.”

**Thomas Prantner**, Production St. Peter/Au



“Despite the very challenging situation for everyone in the first few days, we were able to keep production running smoothly. The production team reacted very calmly and professionally to rumours about possible Covid-19 cases in our company. I will certainly remember those moments on the access bridge, when we closed the barriers for the first time in the company's history in order to prevent outsiders from entering the factory premises unchecked.”

**Wolfgang Dobersberger**, Production Waidhofen/Ybbs



“Another big challenge was to reassure the employees, to take away their fears and worries in order to not spread panic in the company, as the companies in the surrounding area introduced short-time working in production or even closed for 2-3 weeks. Some cost centres were reduced to one-shift operation, as many employees requested child-care or vacation. After 3 weeks we were able to resume two-shift operation.”

**Manfred Kalkhofer**, Production St. Peter/Au



**Controlled access to the company premises**

**Reconstruction work on and inside the building**

“A special challenge due to COVID-19 was the construction site in the area of the main office building, as several external companies were working simultaneously under difficult conditions such as “minimum distance and protective masks”. Despite the not so easy situation, there was also a positive side effect. Most of the employees were in home office at that time, which meant that the offices were freely accessible for the renovation work.”

**Josef Pitner**, Service

**Safety and information measures on the premises**





“We have “split” the sales team into a home office team and an office team. This way, even in the absolute worst case, we could have at least always continued to support our partners with a smaller team. Luckily, this case has never occurred.”

**Wolfgang Dürauer**, Sales Shelving Systems

“We were in the midst of preparing for trade fairs and congresses in Austria, Germany and Switzerland and had to keep the planning running at full speed. The events were unfortunately cancelled at very short notice due to the spread of Covid-19 and uncertainty among the organizers. Some were postponed for several months, others completely cancelled. At the same time, the marketing measures for the newly developed corona protection products have already been implemented.”

**Heinrich Lumetsberger**, Marketing & Communication



“This difficult time also fell into one of the most work intensive one for us. On the one hand, we had to prepare the annual accounts of the current fiscal year and at the same time create the budgets for the coming one. Fortunately, we already have years of experience in this area and all the interfaces to the departments are well established. Despite many people working from home, we were able to master the challenge. But now it is important that everyone is back again!”

**Wolfgang Grosser**, Finance & Controlling



Short-time working at Forster / subsidiaries



Use of video-conference rooms



“Especially for the short-term and highly unpredictable field of advertising systems, these times were and are not easy. Nevertheless, every challenge also holds the potential for new opportunities. With the help of our manufacturing expertise, it was possible to offer innovative and customer-oriented product solutions very quickly.”

**Werner Weninger**, Sales Advertising Systems



“In these difficult times, the home office was a new experience for me. It was essential that the IT infrastructure functioned smoothly in such a short time frame. For urgent work inquiries in the company (e.g. trials on the testing machine), the colleagues on site supported me actively and carried out the work perfectly via video and telephone instructions. Another positive aspect was of course lunch at home every day.”

**Hannes Starkl**, *Research & Development*

“We have transferred the entire team to home office. Fortunately, this worked out very well. There was a video conference held every day, so we could coordinate everything very well. Of course, you cannot completely replace real “office life” with online conferences.”

**Leopold Dietl**, *Sales Noise Control*

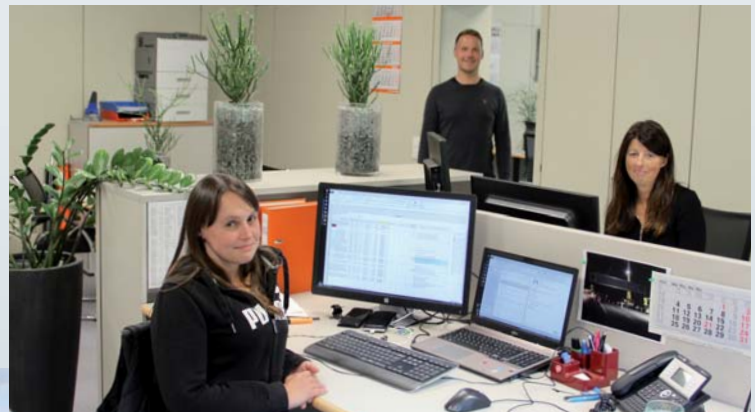


### Return of staff from home office

### First business trip

“In terms of organization, we were able to adapt to the new conditions very quickly with the help of the “home office” solution. Despite all modern communication tools, it was proven once again that personal contact is still very important. It is a good feeling and important that all my colleagues are back in the office again!”

**Stefan Beck**, *Sales Traffic Engineering*



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