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## From switchgear to systems

### User interfaces and switching devices

At 57, steute is not nearly as old as elektrotechnik, but it is able to look back at over five decades of electrical and automation technology. The company is currently in the middle of a transformation from a switchgear manufacturer to a systems provider.

steute began to produce position and limit switches in Bad Oeynhausen in April 1961. At that time, the company profited greatly from the start of a great automation wave – and from the fact that engineering companies were beginning to reduce their in-house production depth. From today's perspective, it is hard to believe that in the 1950s and 60s many mechanical engineering firms were still making their own switching devices, and that steute had to

convince them to "outsource" this part of their production – as it is called today.

Nevertheless, the foundation stone for the customer orientation which steute still has today was thus laid, including development. From the outset, the company also developed customised switching devices, and continues to do so today. In the 1970s, steute was able to establish itself in the complex and then rapidly expanding market for safety switchgear. Meditec was founded as a separate

business unit in 1997 and then, in 2010, a restructuring of the business units took place to include a fourth unit "Wireless". Today steute is known all over the world as a specialist for high-quality switches, sensors and user interfaces for use in particularly complex applications. The company concentrates on four areas: Automation, Extreme (including Ex zones),

*A well-equipped steute sample case: a typical tool for selling industrial goods in the 1960s.*



Meditec and Wireless. In all four business fields, steute produces not only a comprehensive standard range, but also switches, sensors and user interfaces developed specifically for individual customers. The in-house production depth in Löhne/Westfalen is considerable, as is – typically for medium-sized companies – the flexibility. A generously built, state-of-the-art R&D centre reflects the importance attached to engineering input. An international sales and service network, as well as production plants in Brazil and China, guarantee that steute switchgear is internationally available. The company has 350 employees worldwide.

### **Today: wireless networks and interoperable user interfaces**

The path steute has taken to date recently made a dynamic and dramatic turn, as is immediately apparent from some of its new developments. On the basis of its wide range of wireless switching devices and sensors, steute took the decision two years ago to create, for the first time ever, a complete infrastructure for wireless switchgear – its wireless network sWave.NET. This platform facilitates the connection of switches and sensors in production or intralogistics to superordinate IT systems, such as ERP, WMS, MES and PDA. The latest sWave.NET generation now fulfils this task using a simple-to-configure "Sensor Bridge" as a software interface. Thus steute no longer provides just switchgear, but a complete



*From products to systems – the wireless network sWave.NET reflects this trend.*

system for uninterrupted communication between the factory and the integrated world of digital services. A similar development is currently taking place in the medical field, where steute has developed "interoperable" user interfaces permitting surgeons to operate several complex medical devices using just one control. These developments are having far-reaching consequences for nearly all areas of industry: with sWave.NET, steute can offer companies not just "hardware" in the form of switches and sensors, but a complete package. This package includes Access Points which permit the integration of diverse controls and switches in a company IT infrastructure via a common communication platform. All of this requires new methods of customer acquisition, as well as more extensive cooperation during the project planning phase. To sum up: steute is currently in the middle of a transformation driven by digitalisation. With sWave.NET it has developed a platform which ultimately makes it easier for customers to digitalise

their production processes. First customers for the wireless network include manufacturers of consumer goods, automated guided vehicles (AGV) and

mobile E-Kanban systems for intralogistics.

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