GERMANY

Schott offer advanced R&D services to other companies

Utilising specialised expertise from external sources has long been an accepted recipe for success in key industries all over the world.

In the area of glass, however, top level expertise has not been nearly as accessible, due to the extremely specialised nature of this industry. For this reason, the Corporate Research and Technology Development Department of Schott will now be offering its broad range of expertise and process-related know-how to other companies.

Since Schott was founded 125 years ago, research and development have always been top priorities. Currently, some 200 employees work at the Otto Schott Research Centre, Europe's most advanced research centre on special-purpose glass. The research and development group acts as a service division for the Schott Group's 40 production facilities all over the world and concentrates its activities on application-oriented problems.

According to Dr Joachim Küster, vice president of corporate research and technology development at Schott, the new R&D service is specifically designed to meet the growing demand for specialised external resources in the fields of melting, materials and components, coatings, analysis and metrology. 'We are confident that there are quite a few ambitious companies out there who will be interested in taking advantage of our decades of experience in successfully transforming technological innovations into business success,' he told Optical World.

In the area of melting, Schott will be offering expert assistance and support for turn-key melting projects, in addition to providing the equipment, parts, processes, simulation and troubleshooting that customers may require.

The materials and components that Schott develop often have unique properties. Because the materials companies use are critical to ensuring the performance, quality and reliability of the respective end products, Schott high-performance glass and glass-ceramic products result in competitive advantages for the companies that use these.

The new R&D services range from customer-specific development of materials, contract manufacturing of lab to pilot scale quantities, designing and manufacturing of optical and optoelectronic components, and providing expert advice on material processing, as well as scientific studies in various fields of expertise.

Development of special coatings for use in products and analytic measurement services, is another area in which Schott see strong market potential. Here, the company has received accreditation according to DIN EN ISO/IEC 17025, interpretation and problem solving services and their experts provide comprehensive support in resolving any and all types of questions on structures, defects, bubbles, chemical compositions, as well as optical and mechanical properties of glasses, glass-ceramics and thin layers.

In the area of metrology, testing equipment is developed to assess the physical properties and reliability of products and predict their life spans. Many applications of optical materials require an accurate knowledge of their optical properties. Here, Schott is in a unique position when it comes to optical characterisation of both glass and glass-ceramic materials.

UNITED KINGDOM

Vista Optics celebrate 30 years

Vista Optics celebrated their 30th anniversary in October. Founded in 1979 in Bracknell, Berkshire, the firm sell to over 60 countries and has twice been awarded the Queen's Award for Export Achievement. They relocated to the north west of England in 1991 and are presently located in a purpose built 1,432 sq m (15,413 sq ft) facility on a 0.4 hectare site in Widnes, Cheshire.

Perhaps the most important development came in the early 1990s when Vista worked with two independent European intraocular lens manufacturers to develop the first commercial hydrophilic acrylic intraocular lens material which has set the standard for this type of material. In 2000 Vista was the first (and still the only!) small manufacturing company to be awarded the UK Quality Award for business excellence by the British Quality Foundation. This award is the UK equivalent of the US Baldridge award and the Japanese Deming award.

Vista does not rest on its laurels; the company recently developed a hydrophobic IOL material that can be manufactured at room temperature in an equivalent time frame to hydrophilic acrylic materials.

The manufacturing technology will allow for the manufacture of complex designs, something not previously available in the lathed hydrophobic market.

Likewise in the contact lens sector Vista are working on lathable silicone hydrogel materials and are also developing a new range of materials based on novel monomers which will help move the independent contact lens manufacturer to the next generation of materials and wearing modalities.

Founder David Walker says 'It seems only a short while ago that I started Vista. Things have certainly changed in the years since October 1979 but one thing remains constant ... the need to provide good products and excellent service.'