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apollo consulting:
SMB Climate Management
Consultancy of the Year 2024

Automation Solutions CEO of the Year 2024: Ralf Matthews

ELCO Industrie Automation GmbH is one of Germany's leading manufacturers and suppliers of system components, operating across the automotive and mechanical engineering industries with a distinct prowess that has got it noticed on an international level. By producing a series of core components, including of sensors, cables, connectors, and encoders that are all compatible with a variety of machines worldwide, the team is continually diversifying its hold on the market, something bolstered further by its unmatched expertise regarding automation technology, a knowledge that can be described as both broad and deep. At the helm is CEO and awardee Ralf Matthews, who tells us more about the company and his hands-on approach to leadership.

SMB Climate Management Consultancy of the Year 2024: Volker Loibl

Based in Berching, Bavaria, apollo consulting is a sustainability management consultancy firm that helps SMEs to establish sustainable business structures and management systems. At the helm of the company stands Founder and CEO Volker Loibl, a renowned energy economist and business auditor with more than two decades of relevant development and management experience in medium-sized companies. Here, we speak to him to find out more about apollo consulting.

Having studied mechanical engineering in Nuremberg and economics in London, Volker Loibl embarked on a successful career in international sales and business development. Initially, he took on the role of Operations Manager at a pump technology company, before joining an electronic assembly business as Sales Manager in 2001. Over the next 12 years, Volker worked his way up to the position of Senior Sales Manager, then later became Director of Business Development for Europe.

After gaining 20 years of experience tackling challenging management tasks both locally and internationally, Volker was inspired to found apollo consulting in 2013, aiming to support medium-sized companies in their internationalisation and market development. Recognising the growing importance of sustainability for economic success, he focused his consulting services on the topics of the environment, energy, and climate management. As an experienced environmental expert and certified auditor, he set out to help clients remain profitable whilst minimising their environmental impact and use of resources.

In the early days of apollo consulting, Volker's main challenge was managing the high demands placed on his employees due to the complexity of environmental standards and regulations as well as the vast range of industries and trades involved. "In the initial phase, we simply could not put such well-trained experts on the payroll. We avoided this pitfall by working with numerous freelance experts from both science and industry." Another challenge was to convince customers that it makes sense to invest in sustainability even without legal obligations," he explains.

Now a team of experienced implementers, apollo consulting establishes processes and methods for SMEs, empowering them to master the challenges they face pragmatically and profitably. The firm accompanies them on their entire journey to becoming climate-neutral, significantly reducing their impact on the main environmental spheres of air, water, soil, biosphere, and biodiversity. Volker adds, "We work with small and medium-sized companies in all industries and service sectors. However, our focus is on the manufacturing industry."

Specifically, apollo consulting's services include calculating carbon footprints, preparing life cycle assessments, creating management pathways to climate neutrality by 2045, developing external sustainability reporting processes, and generating support for companies' sustainability ratings. Alongside this, the firm develops, integrates, and improves indicator-based ISO management systems in accordance with the entire ISO 14000 and 50000 series of standards.

Recently, over 10 years after Volker first established apollo consulting, it has been announced that, from 2025, sustainability management will become a legal obligation for SMEs. This will directly affect more than 15,000 organisations across Germany. On top of this, it is expected

that 150,000 smaller companies in the supply chain will be affected indirectly due to delays caused by a "trickle-down effect".

As a result, SMEs are facing huge challenges in the race for successful transformation, struggling not to lose out to larger companies that are equipped with greater structural, management, and financial capabilities. With apollo consulting's specialised methods and tools, SMEs can fulfil their legal obligations without growing overburdened, all whilst generating real business benefits. Volker comments, "We are not going into the meeting room selling colourful PowerPoint slides with high-flying strategies. We go into the customer's engine room and roll up our sleeves to achieve results."

In its work, apollo consulting's strategy involves the adoption of two different perspectives: the outside-in view and the inside-out view. As part of the former, the firm observes the development of the market, climate change, and legal landscape with an unbiased and critical eye, assessing the consequential impacts on its clients. As part of the latter, apollo consulting analyses and evaluates the impact of clients' corporate activities on the environment, identifying what can be done to mitigate these effects. Overall, the firm's goal is to go above and beyond, enabling clients to not just meet the minimum standards but also surpass them to capitalise on these competitive advantages.

Internally, apollo consulting's culture is centred around entrepreneurship, excellence, and empathy. The team are committed to upholding these values in everything they do, from their provision of management consultancy services to their collaboration with others. They never talk down to the client, instead striving to deliver the best possible services, commitment, and results.

When it comes to his own personal leadership style, Volker primarily aims to empower his employees to develop, grow, and realise their full potential. "The focus is always on people and their individual ideas, requirements, and goals," he explains. "After all, the attitude of each and every one of us determines whether we succeed in sustainably protecting the environment and climate and shaping our future together in a positive way. We have thus created a corporate culture that promotes strengths and identifies development potential in mutual respect."

As a result of his exceptional work in establishing and leading apollo consulting for over 10 years, Volker Loibl has been named SMB Climate Management Consultancy of the Year in the German CEO Excellence Awards 2024. Looking towards the future, he believes that there are exciting times ahead for his business, with the CSRD (Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive) coming into play for SMEs from 2025. However, many of the companies affected have not yet started to implement sustainability measures, hoping for a postponement or relaxation of the legal requirements.



"Every company is advised to start developing and establishing the necessary methods and processes in its own organisation as soon as possible - which means today," Volker comments. "Those who fail to do so risk becoming a stranded asset in the medium term and disappearing from the market. We anticipate significant order volumes and possibly even a shortage of available management consultants in the next two years."

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