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Festo Canada celebrating 50 years of helping make Canada an automation nation

The year was 1975. Newly created Festo Canada joined an industrial eco-system feeling the stirrings of accelerating technological change, a transformation that would become known as Industry 3.0. PLCs, articulated robots, computer numerical control systems were beginning to proliferate. The first US patent for Ethernet was filed that year. That was also the year Festo launched the world's first standard pneumatic cylinder series.

So much more was to follow, leading up to Industry 4.0 as we are experiencing today – digitalization, the Industrial internet of Things, cloud computing – and beyond, as industry begins widespread adoption of artificial intelligence and machine learning, with a growing emphasis on sustainability.

This year is a double anniversary. The 50th for Festo Canada and 100th for its parent company. Over the past five decades, Festo Canada has played a prominent role in helping make the country an automation nation. Festo Canada is the market leader in pneumatics and after the turn of the century, a strong player in electric automation – motion control and I/O automation. Today, its offer to Canadian industry is unique: a technologically-agnostic supplier that supports best-case solutions with pneumatics, electric automation or smart combinations of both.

“During my tenure at Festo, I watched Festo Canada grow as both a business entity and as a source of ideas and inspiration that are part of Festo's global success,” says Carlos Miranda, the recently retired President and CEO of North America. “The market-building *esprit de corps* of Festo Canada and its people, their commitment to delivering the highest quality to their customers, reflects the best of Festo in action.”

Leveraging the family-owned Festo Group's innovation leadership and commitment to quality, Festo Canada developed a grass-roots approach to sales and support that is without equal, catering to the bifurcated nature of Canada's industrial base. The country's significant community of small- and mid-sized Original Equipment Manufacturers, custom machine-builders and systems integrators require different handling than large multinational manufacturers.

Festo Canada sales staff in the field are known for building strong relationships with these smaller customers, often providing advice on componentry at the conceptual or prototyping stages to help point a project in the right direction. “That willingness to maintain a closeness with customers, even walk the extra mile with them

in some cases, is a major part of the brand Festo Canada has built over the past half century,” says *Jean-Francois Paquette*, Canadian Sales Director. “We want those customers to succeed and grow along with us.”

The Customer Interaction Centre based at headquarters in Mississauga provides product and technical support. Where additional engineering assistance is needed to validate or improve a custom design or even optimize performance post-commissioning, the Customer Solutions team based there as well can be invaluable. Machine builders and systems integrators can get supplemental engineering support, even product customization or assembly, on a pay-or-play basis, which helps them contain their engineering overhead. In addressing customers' special needs across multiple industries, Customer Solutions continues to develop solutions for the market, some of which are now in the global Festo catalogue – such as the VTSA IO-Link solution with the top hat PN 8152353. Other solutions, like the Festo Motion Control Package (FMCP) and Telescopic Tooling, continue to be sold through Customer Solutions, enabling more Festo hardware to be used worldwide.

Another innovative way Festo Canada is helping smaller manufacturers and processors lacking the in-house expertise to incorporate more automation into their operations is to pair them with a Festo-certified systems integrator suitable for their needs. Launched last year, this free match-making service is designed to create a way forward for companies to move projects beyond the aspirational.

Globally, Festo has a profound commitment to industrial learning and training, and for decades, Festo Canada has been an avid practitioner of reaching out to future STEM grads. Many Canadians in the trades get to know the company first as students, thanks to Festo partnerships with community colleges and skills development programs and competitions. At Humber Polytechnic's Barrett Centre for Technology Innovation, students use Festo Didactic products like the exceptional Festo Cyber-Physical model factory to learn about areas such as the latest in digitalized automation, robotics, and systems integration. The Festo Cyber-Physical model factory also plays a key role in industrial workforce development, as it is used for industry events and workshops.

Festo Canada has been a proud sponsor of the mechatronics competition of Skills/Compétences Canada since 1992. Contenders build a mechatronic system using Festo Didactic's factory floor-ready training equipment for the unique opportunity to engage in learning beyond the classroom and put their skills to the test in a real-world situation. Festo collaborates with Humber on a STEM outreach program to engage youth and provides internship opportunities for students at Festo headquarters in Germany, as well as employment pathways at Festo Canada.

Today, Festo is well-represented in the Canadian industrial landscape from coast-to-coast, by sales staff and a comprehensive network of partner distributors selected for their demonstrated expertise and reliability on a regional or sectoral basis. Festo Canada has built up sales and support capabilities in both official languages, including a fully bilingual website and Customer Interaction Center.

For Dr. Wilm Uhlenbecker, Carlos Miranda's successor, the strength of Festo in North America is owed in part to its three national entities – Festo Canada, Festo USA and Festo Mexico – adapting to their own unique market conditions rather than trying to apply a single global or continental model. “Festo Canada's

exemplifies the best in Festo, taking a world leading product portfolio and charting a distinctive course which has earned it sustained success and respect.”

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