



# The Man who will lead the EPTDA through the storm in 2021-2022

EPTDA, the leading executive association for industrial distributors and manufacturers across Europe, the Middle East & Africa, announced recently with great pleasure and honour that Mr Des Spillings was appointed as the new President, who will lead the strategic development of this unique association and community for the next two years.

We reached out to Mr. Spillings, for an interview where he could outline his vision for the future of the association and the PT/MC industry. As well as some key insights into the role an association like EPTDA plays during the current pandemic like COVID, to continue driving an entire industry forward.

*Des SPILLINGS,  
President at EPTDA*





**Q: First of all, we would like to congratulate you with your new position within EPTDA. We know that you have been serving the EPTDA as a volunteer on several committees and most recently as the Chairman of the Distribution Development Committee. How does it feel to become now the President at EPTDA?**

Des: Thank you! Joining EPTDA as a volunteer helped me gain valuable insights on the PT/MC industry and market, but above all, it helped me connect with people working in the same industry from various countries around the world. It is a great benefit to be connected to such a large network of professionals and to be able to exchange ideas and best practice – we work in the same industry and the challenges can be very similar across companies so it can be really helpful talking with your peers and finding ideas and solutions that could be used within your own company. As a Chairman of the Distribution Development Committee and, at the same time, EPTDA Vice-President for two years, I took the time to pay attention to the EPTDA community, to see how people and businesses evolved and provide support

to the former EPTDA President, Mr. Zoltan Arkovics. I think that this period helped me to be more prepared for the role of the EPTDA President – the times are even more challenging now, due to the COVID-19 crisis, but EPTDA has proved to be a strong community and I am sure that is going to remain the case in the future.

**Q: Can you tell us more about your background and current activities?**

Des: I have worked in the mechanical engineering industry for over 30 years, almost straight from school. I joined acorn in 1995 in an „inside sales” role and worked my way up through the company. Myself and my business partner, Melvyn Parsley, completed a MBO of the company in 2005 and 10 years later we sold the business to Axel Johnson International. Today I am still active as a Director at Acorn Industrial Services

but my main role is divisional manager for Power Transmission Solutions at Axel Johnson International. Acorn joined EPTDA in 2001, so I was privileged to witness and to be involved in the development of both the EPTDA and the changes in the industry as a whole.

**Q: How did the pandemic impact the activities of EPTDA so far? Which changes have been implemented since the start of the outbreak?**

Des: I think I may say that EPTDA has been as affected as much as every organization by the COVID-19 crisis. The different (international) rules and restrictions put in place to stop the virus, prevented us from meeting and seeing each other face to face. We had to postpone our EPTDA Annual Business Convention in Warsaw and we moved as much as possible into the digital arena. Looking on the bright

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side, we had the opportunity to see each other more often and to be in touch all the time, albeit virtually. We organized our different committees and Board of Directors' meetings via the online meeting tools available; EPTDA enjoyed its first Digital Summit in September 2020, where experts shared their knowledge with all EPTDA members, and we kept a close communication with our members. Of course, we are all looking forward to the moment when we can finally travel freely and meet each other once again – I think this COVID-19 crisis made us reevaluate the importance of human interaction.

**Q: EPTDA held for the first time in its history the Annual Convention and the MDIDEX online with digital meetings. How was the result of these meetings? Do you think that this option and approach of MDIDEX meetings are here to stay?**

Des: Indeed, for the first time in its history, EPTDA went fully digital with its well-known MD-IDEX meetings. The results were positive, considering the context and we were happy to include more members from our companies in these meetings. However, on the long-term, we do not consider the digital version of the MD-IDEX meetings as a permanent solution. As mentioned earlier, I think we all miss the face to face meetings and, although we are very happy that it is so easy to set up digital meetings these days, there are just some things that technology cannot replace yet.

**Q: How do you see the future of the power transmission and motion control industries for the coming years ahead?**

Des: It still has a big future. The industry will change but it has always changed. The simplicity of what customers really need doesn't move. They want great customer service and technical knowhow combined with a growing assortment of available products and services. This won't change. We need to make sure we understand what our customers want and not presume that we know what they want based on what they were content with before. How we provide those parts and services to our customers will change

and evolve but I think we already knew that. Before covid we were all talking consolidation, Globalization and digitalization. Maybe the next couple of years will be a bit more back to basics.

**Q: Which are the biggest challenges that manufacturer and distributor companies will face?**

Des: Encouraging young, talented and aspiring people into our businesses and keeping them in our businesses will continue to be a challenge. The new working from home environment will make it easier for employees to move around, virtual interviews and never meeting your colleagues might have looked strange 12 months ago but it's a new world that is probably here to stay. Sustainability will also be a greater part of our working lives in the future and our ability to be agile and adaptable will be key to succeeding in the future.

**Q: What role does EPTDA play towards its member companies during the COVID-19 crisis**

Des: EPTDA is a strong anchor of support for its members during the COVID-19 crisis. Our goal is to provide our members with as much relevant information as possible. We have the Oxford Economic reports and forecasts that provide country by country analysis. We also have the PTMI reports that give monthly data on our market with data given by the leading distributors and manufacturers across the region. Our reborn leadership academy will also help aspiring employees of members in gaining extra insight into our industry.

**Q: We know that the pandemic situation has changed some of our habits. Do you foresee any structural changes at EPTDA in the future, as a result of habitual changes at personal level within the member companies?**

Des: EPTDA has recognised that it also needs to change if it wants to survive and be relevant for the next 20 years. We will and have started to become a more efficient organisation while hopefully encouraging more diversity in our

membership, committees and board. We need to have a more active board, we are all volunteers but if we take a position on the board or a committee then we must take the responsibility and make the time that comes with it. We have a great succession plan in place but we must increase the transparency, clarity and understanding of the organization for our members.

### About Des Spillings

*Des Spillings is an experienced leader with over 30 years history of working in the mechanical power transmission industry. Mr Spillings also has a role on the management team of Axel Johnson International – PTS Division. Skilled in Business Planning, Business-to-Business (B2B), Account Management, Engineering, Continuous Improvement and People Leadership, Mr Spillings has been a crucial contributor to the delivery of EPTDA's 5-Year Strategic Plan. His personal journey, professional network and reputation in the industry mirrors the core values of EPTDA of Open Dialogue, Mutual Respect, Integrity, Honesty, Fairness, Continuous Growth and Continuous Learning. He has served as a volunteer on several committees of EPTDA, most recently as the Chairman of the Distribution Development Committee and Vice President of the EPTDA.*

### About EPTDA

*EPTDA is the leading executive association for industrial distribution distributors and manufacturers across Europe, the Middle East & Africa, setting the highest commercial, environmental, social and ethical standards. Its mission is to advance distribution and strengthen members to be successful, profitable and competitive in a changing market environment. EPTDA vision is to be the leading community in the EMEA region for industrial distribution, as recognized by customers. EPTDA currently has a membership of more than 243 leading companies across 34 countries worldwide, working with some 320,000 employees and representing over €22 billion in annual revenues.*