



# One portal, many components

PES met up with Brigitte Beck, CEO at Solare Datensysteme GmbH. Their new portal, developed over 2 years, with input from customers, provides plant operators with an even faster and deeper fault analysis, saving considerable time and expenditure. They are at the cutting edge of digitalisation and that is where they aim to stay.

**PES:** Hello Brigitte, it is my pleasure to welcome you to PES Solar. It's been a while since we talked to someone from

Solar-Log™ and it's great to have the opportunity to get informed. The company has been part of the BKW Group, one of the

largest energy service providers in Switzerland, for quite some time now and there was a change in the management of



Credit: Stanislav Erman

Brigitte Beck

**the company last year. Would you first like to give our readers a brief overview of the company?**

**Brigitte Beck:** Solare Datensysteme GmbH (SDS) has been very successfully active in the global market for almost 15 years with its well-known Solar-Log™ brand. Since 2015, SDS has been part of the listed energy group BKW AG in Switzerland. We have developed from purely providing PV monitoring into a provider covering the entire energy management spectrum. In 2019 and 2020, Solar-Log has taken further decisive steps into the future and is venturing into new dimensions with innovations in the hard and software sector. We have transformed, or newly implemented processes, in order to develop even faster and closer to the market and customers.

In recent years we have supplemented our team of experts with numerous new specialists and managers with industry experience in order to implement the latest technologies. The networking with BKW has been further expanded, resulting in a transfer of knowledge in both directions and many helpful synergy effects.

**PES:** Would you say the solar/PV industry is expanding at the moment?

**BB:** Overall, yes, although the consequences of the corona crisis will of course continue to accompany us for some time yet, the supply bottlenecks for solar modules are a case in point. Unfortunately, the situation in some markets is difficult due to indecisive and

restrictive policies.

In Germany, for example, the 52 GW subsidy cap is making the further expansion of photovoltaics very difficult for us. The strong movement to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in combination with the partial phase-out of coal and nuclear power is promoting alternative energy sources, and the PV industry is benefiting from this.

Progressive digitalisation and a wide range of services are constantly bringing new players onto the market. Here, too, competition is stimulating business and ensuring that developments in the renewable energies field are advancing with a rapid pace of innovation.

**PES:** Please could you tell us about Solar-Log's managing and monitoring systems?

**BB:** Our self-developed hard and software covers all requirements for modern energy management worldwide, irrespective of the size of the respective plant and plant fleet, up to 2 MW and larger if required.

Intelligent plant control with solutions, for example, for optimising self-consumption, feed-in management and the direct marketing of electricity are just as much a part of our product portfolio as our comprehensive range of services with our Solar-Log™ WEB-4U platform for plant operators and investors.

**PES:** Monitoring is very important to our industry, why is that and how is the data

collected used?

**BB:** Monitoring is essential to ensure the functionality and thus the financial efficiency of PV plants and PV fleets. A sensible energy management system must also be able to reliably perform regulation and control tasks in order to secure the return on the PV investment at all times.

Solar-Log™ permanently processes the collected data so that the monitored plant can always be optimally controlled. We are able to evaluate the anonymised data from the plants in order to advance the further development of our products in a correspondingly customer-led manner. Our servers are all located in Germany and Norway, which guarantees the greatest possible data security.

**PES:** We have been hearing about your new WEB Enerest™ 4 portal, can you explain to us what it is?

**BB:** Solar-Log WEB Enerest™ 4 is a completely new portal developed from scratch that deploys cutting edge technologies. It was created during two years of extensive development work. The aim was to create the best platform on the market and provide plant operators with an even faster and deeper fault analysis and save them considerable working time.

WEB 4 is extremely clear, absolutely intuitive to use and can be configured according to users' preferences. We ensure this with many newly developed features. In short: Solar-Log WEB Enerest™ 4 is intended to become the installer's best employee!





**PES: Why did Solar-Log™ decide to invest considerable resources in building a new monitoring platform?**

**BB:** We have become, if you will, victims of our own success. With well over 300,000 plants now monitored by Solar-Log™ worldwide, it was foreseeable that we would eventually reach our performance limits with the previous portal.

Solar-Log™ is constantly evolving and with the new platform we wanted to create the basis for further future products and services relating to renewable energies. Now we are delighted about its unlimited performance and flexibility, including for future market requirements.

**PES: What are the technical benefits of the new WEB 4, or is it just a graphical makeover?**

**BB:** Everything about WEB Enerest™ 4 is absolutely new! As already mentioned, it was developed from scratch to offer users the optimum in usability, perfect overview and fast error analysis. Our development team has created a completely new software architecture for WEB Enerest™ 4 and divided the individual services into a newly designed server landscape.

Availability and performance have become absolutely future-proof. This has enabled us

to integrate new features and tools. Occasional problems in the past are therefore now passé and we are now very well positioned. The interaction of our new, powerful hardware with the flexible software leaves nothing to be desired for users.

**PES: Can you tell us a little bit about the handling, is it complex to master or do you need special training for it?**

**BB:** User-friendliness was the main focus from the very beginning in developing the new platform. In our opinion, a quickly comprehensible and intuitive operation is essential nowadays. After all, users should be able to work quickly and successfully with the portal on a daily basis and not have to spend a lot of time familiarising themselves with it.

Simple handling, a clear structure, clear presentation and user-definable settings were right at the top of our developers' specifications from the start. There were also considerable demands regarding the constantly changing access needs for different users that allow graduated visibility and options, including with a variety of options based on the latest security standards.

**PES: Are improvements and updates imported automatically, or does the user have to follow a special process?**

**BB:** A portal like ours is in some ways a living

organism. That means it's constantly evolving. Here, too, it's about offering users the greatest possible benefit with the least possible personal effort. Updates are therefore made automatically; users do not have to worry about them. New functionalities are constantly being developed to meet the constantly changing market requirements.

**PES: You have a customer-oriented innovation process, how did this come about and how does it work?**

**BB:** Involving future users in the development of the new WEB Enerest™ 4 at an early stage, has enabled us to implement their suggestions and wishes in many ways. We have supplemented our know-how from having the longest experience in the market with that of our customers and external experts. After all, we wanted to develop a product that was always practice-oriented and not one that was created in an ivory tower.

During an elaborate beta phase prior to the release, installers, wholesalers and investors were able to continuously contribute their input, which provided us with many more valuable hints and tips that have been incorporated into the new portal. We have developed WEB 4 with our customers. We are therefore sure that it will meet the requirements of our customers in the long run.

**‘The interaction of our new, powerful hardware with the flexible software leaves nothing to be desired for users.’**

**PES:** What about customers currently using the older version of the monitoring platform, can they automatically switch to the new platform or is the system simply updated here?

**BB:** Of course, the existing portal can continue to be used for the time being. At the beginning of 2021 we will contact users of the ‘previous’ portal who have not yet migrated to convince them to migrate with a simple, automated process, whereby the WEB Enerest™ 4 portal speaks for itself. For new customers it naturally makes sense to start right away with the new Solar-Log WEB Enerest™ 4.

**PES:** Why should prospective clients choose your solutions, what makes Solar-Log™ stand out from the competition, what are the benefits in terms of cost and performance?

**BB:** As already mentioned, we wanted to bring a portal to the market with the highest possible benefits and manageable costs for users, which can also be configured flexibly.

In addition to standard monitoring, which is simple, fast and clear with WEB 4 and ensures long-term plant success, the new platform offers extensive possibilities for energy



management and plant control. This is worthwhile and brings with it even greater cost efficiency. The existing ‘compatibility with almost all inverter manufacturers’ has been further developed as a unique feature.

The open system platform integrates many systems. In short: one portal, many

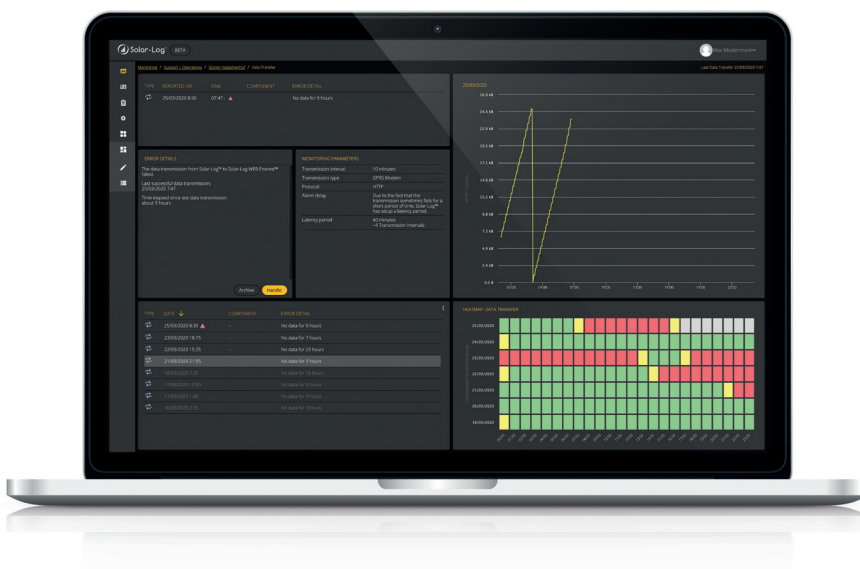
components. The new WEB 4 is accompanied by a raft of services that relieve customers of work and ensure yields. An example here is direct marketing from a single source.

**PES:** What are your predictions for the solar/PV industry in general and your company in particular for 2020, are there currently any new projects?

**BB:** Despite the Corona crisis, which of course has also not left our industry unscathed, we are confident that we will continue to experience many technical innovations, not least from our company!

After all, the energy transition is not over, but rather is only just beginning. We at Solar-Log™ will certainly do our part in helping to further disseminate environmentally friendly energies and are already positioning ourselves more broadly than in the past. Linking the individual sectors in the energy industry will bring with it many new opportunities.

Digitalisation poses a considerable challenge for our industry in general and our company in particular, but it also represents a great opportunity. One thing is certain: there’s no future without renewable energy!



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