

Adidas shifts German, US smart factories to Asia

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Adidas' experiment in using hi-tech to produce running shoes closer to customers is ending

Sportswear maker Adidas announced Monday it was closing two niche

but flagship factories in Germany and the United States that use robots and 4D printing to make sneakers, shifting the manufacturing to cheaper Asian factories instead.

The production of high-tech running shoes at its so-called speedfactories in Germany's Ansbach and in the US city of Atlanta "will be discontinued by April 2020 at the latest", Adidas said in a statement.

Just three years ago, the Bavaria-based group had hailed its speedfactory concept—which uses highly automated processes to make shoes more quickly, more customised and closer to sales outlets—as proof that manufacturing jobs could return to high-wage countries.

But from the end of this year, the speedfactory shoes will join Adidas' other models and be produced by existing suppliers in Asia, the group said.

Citing "advancements" made at the suppliers, the move would make production of the shoes "more flexible and economic while simultaneously expanding the range of products available", Adidas executive board member Martin Shankland said.

The two speedfactories churn out just a million of the roughly 400 million athletic shoes made by the group each year.

The future of the Ansbach plant's 160 workers is unclear at the moment.

The factory is operated by the German technology firm Oechsler, which has collaborated with Adidas on the project.

Oechsler CEO Claudius Kozlik said in the same statement that he regretted Adidas' pullout.

But he stressed that the two companies would continue to work together on soles for football shoes and 4D-printed soles.

Like 3D printing, 4D printing produces three-dimensional objects at the touch of a button but then goes further by creating materials that change properties when they come into contact with triggers such as water or heat.

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