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Forming the perfect match

As two partners that are ideally suited to each other, Albert van der Veen and Xindao form the perfect match. A stroke of luck. The fact that Albert van der Veen chose to embark on his very successful career path in the field of promotional products is due to a single circumstance: an internship abroad during his studies.



An internship during his international business studies brought Albert van der Veen into contact with the world of promotional products. However, initially it was only important for him to do an internship a-

broad. The industry was secondary. But as life sometimes plays tricks, a coincidence led to the decisive path. And, of course, we might now ask ourselves the question: Are there coincidences or was it fate? From a philosophical point of view, coincidence is what occurs when something else could have happened under the same conditions. If Albert van der Veen had chosen another internship during his studies, he would perhaps not be the managing director of the Dutch promotional product specialist Xindao. But regardless of whether it was coincidence or fate, the two found each other. And, according to the 46-year-old, they are also very well suited to each other: "Xindao is a very ambitious, very young company that differs from the others. These qualities are perfect for me." Sandro van Hellenberg Hubar, one of the founders of Xindao, goes one step further: "Albert's DNA perfectly matches that of Xindao." Small wonder, therefore, that he convinced the father of two daughters to join his company six years ago.

Beginning of a lasting bond

But first things first. When Albert van der Veen studied international business at Hoge School Haarlem, he had to complete an internship abroad. He chose to travel to the USA – to PF Concept. The company was so impressed, it offered him a permanent position after his examination in 1995. This was the beginning of a lasting bond with the promotional product sector that has continued till this day. For 15 years, Albert van der Veen helped to steer the fortunes of PF Concept, as the head of product development and the marketing department as well as a member of the management team. Then came the point in time at which he sought a new challenge. “I joined the company in 1995 when Polyflame generated sales of 20 million euros, which then increased enormously to 250 million euros in 2008. In addition, the company, as I see it, had lost a certain individuality after numerous takeovers and management buyouts. Nevertheless, PF Concept was still a professional and efficient company. I’ve learned a lot from PF Concept”, says Albert van der Veen.

Same ideas and same visions

“The reasons for joining Xindao were the company was smaller, more individual and consequently more flexible in its decision-making processes, as well as the growth potential offered by using a very professional platform and the good image of the company in the market. Equally important were the personal similarities with the board, with which I share the same ideas and the same vision. I have always seen Xindao as a supplier that stands out from the crowd. When I was asked if I wanted to go to the next step with the company, it was clear to me that I had to seize this opportunity. “No sooner said than done. Albert van der Veen joined Xindao at the very top, becoming a global manager with a clear mandate to lead the company to the forefront in Europe, to increase sales and profitability. This position led him and his now family of four to Shanghai for five years. A decision that he welcomed, for “the heart of Xindao beats in Shanghai in every respect. This is where all the strings are pulled”. Today, the 46-year-old is back at the company headquarters in the Dutch city of Rijswijk.

Clear, individual identity

During the six years of his affiliation with Xindao, much has changed at the company. Important to Albert van der Veen, however, is that “an excellent foundation had already been laid for these changes. Over the past 30 years, Xindao has achieved a great deal. The founders take credit for this. They have provided Xindao with a lot of entrepreneurial spirit and culture.” Xindao was founded by Diederik van Styrum and Sandro van Hellenberg Hubar



ALBERT VAN DER VEEN IN PERSON

What was your first thought this morning?

Hope that today will be again a business day as good as yesterday!

When is your day a good one?

After a positive day at work coming home and having dinner with my family hearing all stories of them.

What gets you in a good mood?

Playing football!

And what drives you crazy?

Election debates between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump!

When do you lose track of time?

Actually never.

If you were forced to take a four-week holiday, where would you go?

A tour to Argentina, Chili, Peru and Costa Rica. Because I have been all around the world but never yet in South America.

What do you like spending your money on?

Nice dinners and holidays.

Do you let yourself get seduced by advertisements?

I do not think so.

When is a promotional product a good promotional product?

When it is used and appreciated by the addressee!

What is the best promotional product you have ever received?

I hardly get promotional products/gifts. Once I got a branded wine opener which I still use.

What do you find irritating in relation to promotional products?

Useless plastic promotional products with large company logos that end up in the bin or drawer within one day.

in the Dutch town of Rijswijk in 1986. The company has evolved from a start-up to one of the largest globally operating manufacturers of promotional product, serving more than 4,000 distributors of promotional products across Europe. The company name “Xindao”, which refers to a new way, a new direction, is the best expression of the philosophy of the multinational advertising specialist: establishing businesses with new ideas and long-term relationships. Xindao now has offices in Scandinavia, the UK, France, Spain, Italy, China and Russia. “The greatest achievement,” says Albert van der Veen, “is that we have become a leading manufacturer of everyday products with their own, clear identity. We keep our promises and deliver what is needed – the customer is always the focus of

our interest. This explains why we were able to take the company to where it is now. We cover twelve product areas and produce state-of-the-art technology.” However, he is undeniably credited with the fact that Xindao’s sales have doubled since 2010 and are steadily rising. “Obviously, our customers appreciate what we do and what we offer. In the meantime, they regard us as a supplier of daily necessities. That was not so before 2010”, says Albert van der Veen in emphasizing the performance of the entire company. When asked what makes Xindao distinctive within the promotional product sector, a prompt answer follows: “Xindao has a clear identity of its own. We are not simply one of many suppliers like most of the others. We believe in functionality that makes the difference and is recognized by the recipients.” Moreover, “distributors appreciate us because we do not simply use issues such as compliance as a marketing tool. Acting in accordance with European laws and regulations is something that our customers must not expect as something special, but as a matter of course.”

Intensifying partnership with distributors

Albert van der Veen sees a future in good supplier-distributor relations. “There will always be suppliers, for example, who enter the market and can contact end customers directly via online trading. But the value-added chain, as it is today, will continue.” As for Xindao, he added, “In any case, we will continue to deal exclusively with distributors. We want an even closer relationship and partnership.” And in the view of Albert van der Veen there is also a good reason for this: “We do not believe in cheap, useless products. Therefore, functional products will make the difference. And these products need supportive advice when they are targeted to the customer – especially when a story about the product is to be told by the customer. This is where distributors and consultants come into play. Precisely because they are urgently needed is why I am firmly convinced that the ‘traditional distributor’ has enormous growth potential.” At this point, however, the Dutchman sees the trade at a crossroads: “Distributors have to decide: Either they are pure online distributors or they remain traditional consultants and take advantage of their added value.” At the same time, Albert van der Veen also emphasizes that he is grateful to all distributors who have placed their trust in Xindao over the past 30 years. “They have made us what we are today. And together with them, we will continue to grow in the next 30 years.”

Finding the right balance

When it comes to the plans and projects of Xindao, Albert van der Veen categorizes them in short-, medium- and long-term goals. In the short term, he summed up without beating about the bush: “Doing what we do today



**MY GOAL WITH
XINDAO?
GROWING
WITHOUT
ENDANGERING
OUR IDENTITY.**

Albert van der Veen



but just a little better. We would like to launch new products every month through our webshop, instead of publishing all our new products in a catalogue once or twice a year.” In the medium term, Albert van der Veen wants Xindao to create an even more customer-friendly e-commerce solution with a simple order function. And in the long term? “With our collection, we want to capture the North American market and expand our sales activities in China. My personal goal with Xindao is to grow without endangering our identity.” And what about your personal goals? Again, Albert van der Veen does not need long to answer: “I want to find the right balance between work and private life, and travel around the world with my family.” <