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Kai Gminder

Competence in the fourth generation

Since 2012, Kai Gminder and Rolf Daiber have been directing the fortunes of textile specialist Gustav Daiber. Kai Gminder embodies and nurtures the characteristic “spirit” of the company with conviction, but he increasingly sets his own accents. How Gminder has further developed the family business is shown by his years as managing director.



One cannot talk to or about Kai Gminder without having in mind the now 105-year history of the company founded by his great-grandfather Gustav Daiber. Every generation has recognised and profitably pursued the spirit of the times, and today Daiber is one of the most renowned and efficient textile suppliers in Europe. Kai Gminder, the latest managing director, also continues to weave the thread of success that has evolved over the decades. Proximity to the customer is still the number one priority – even though the former commercial agency for textile accessories has long been a modern, internationally operating textile company.

Customer orientation is first and foremost

“We do everything for the customer and orientate ourselves towards what he wants. That is why personal customer contact comes first. The customer must always know that behind the company are people who advise and provide solutions,” explains Kai Gminder, recalling that as early as 1930 Gustav Daiber personally supplied his customers who were scattered throughout the Alb. Even today, it is a matter of course that the management team do not hide behind their desks, but actively seek and maintain contact with customers, suppliers and employees. Gminder himself attends trade shows as often as possible or is present in the company: “Whenever possible, I visit all departments every day. That is how I get a feel for the requirements of our customers and employees and can directly eliminate any problems.” He often helps out at the packing table, fills up shelves in the commissioning warehouse and asks around in sales and marketing to find out what the customer wants. And he is always ready to listen to the employees.

Practical experience is essential

Kai Gminder has learned from Rolf Daiber that a business manager should really know everything and be prepared to lend a hand when it matters. He gave his nephew, who joined the family business in 2005 after graduating in business studies (marketing, communications), the sound practical knowledge that distinguishes him today. Gminder is convinced that “you have to have had practical experience to be able to make sensible decisions”. In fact, his practical experience began at a time when he “could barely look over the table.” He was often in the company as a child, along with his now deceased mother Anita Gminder (Rolf Daiber’s sister), grandfather Walter Daiber and, of course, Rolf Daiber, who managed the steadily growing business. From an early age, he knew all the processes in printing and embroidery and today still recalls the familiar smell of the ironing department. Of course, he also worked in different departments later on during his vacations and while studying, and continued to learn many things.

With conviction back to the Alb

Nevertheless, his career choice was originally elsewhere: he first wanted to become a civil engineer and completed an apprenticeship as a draftsman. But then he turned to economics. That was at the time when the company focused on the promotional products market and was strongly expanding. This targeted orientation towards advertising, the exciting development of their own collections and the spirit of optimism that took hold of the family in those years were the many small building blocks that brought the student closer to the company again. An internship at a corporate group ultimately led to a clear decision to join the family business: “Here at our company, everyone contributes to our success, and is recognised and respected for this. And you can see the result of your work. I learned that myself during my jobs. I simply could not imagine another environment.” When the former sales manager unexpectedly left the company in 2005, the course was finally set. A thorough training programme in several departments marked the start of his gradual development to managing director in 2012.

Intensive supplier contacts

This included getting to know the production sites in Bangladesh, China and Pakistan. The operation in the huge spinning mills, dye works and weaving factories greatly impressed Kai Gminder and made him more aware of the structural change in his native country: After the Alb had been the recognised location of a high-performance textile industry for centuries, the textile industry collapsed through the relocation of production facilities to Asia in the mid-nineties. Daiber even managed to benefit from



KAI GMINDER IN PERSON

What was your first thought this morning?

Off we go!

When is your day a good one?

When I can check off everything on my to-do list and still leave some time for the unforeseen.

What gets you in a good mood?

Good weather for flying.

And what drives you crazy?

Disorder and turning up late.

What are you most likely to forgive yourself for?

Fine food.

When do you lose track of time?

During a nice sightseeing flight over the Swabian Alb.

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

To the North Cape. Most of all, I would like to make a sightseeing trip in a camper.

What do you like spending your money on?

On my home and family.

Do you let yourself get seduced by advertisements?

Most certainly. It would be awful if it were not so. After all, advertising is our profession.

When is a promotional product a good promotional product?

When it is a textile product!

What is the best promotional product you have ever received?

Bert from mbw: A cuddly little guy who always puts a smile on my face. Great for stress management!

What do you find irritating in relation to promotional products?

Cheap imitations in direct import.

this as many buildings and warehouse space were freed up, thus making it possible to expand in terms of space. Today, Daiber operates around 60,000 square metres of warehouse space in Albstadt and the surrounding region together with a logistics partner, and a further 4,000 have just been added. Around 2,000 parcels are dispatched daily from Albstadt. Visiting factories in Asia has meanwhile become routine for Gminder: two to three times a year, he and a selected team are on site to maintain contact

with suppliers and regularly inspect the quality. “Personal exchange of information with our regular suppliers is extremely important because we now supply entire collections which have to be consistent in terms of colour and cut. We cannot tolerate any deviations.”

Always in touch with the times

Walter Daiber had already recognised that the key to success is to combine trade, in-house production and later import under one roof. Here is a brief review: Initially, the company operated as a textile wholesaler as well as a contract printing and embroidery shop for brands. In the mid-70s, a new fashion trend was born, which would take Daiber to new heights: printed, embroidered and glittering T-shirts – at that time, a must in every fashionable outfit. The then still very young Managing Director Rolf Daiber reacted immediately and laid the foundations for finishing textiles using all processes common at that time. For example, in 1975 he secured the sole agency of the first manufacturer of transfer motifs in Germany and began creating his own motifs which were later also marketed internationally. As demand continued to boom, Rolf Daiber set off for Asia to find manufacturers. In 1985, he started to set up a printing shop and applied photos as motifs onto T-shirts using offset printing for the first time. No wonder he has a lot of knowledge about printing, which he likes to pass on. Since a great deal of in-house finishing capacity was available, caps were included in the range as the first promotional product in 1995. Many have witnessed the success of the Myrtle Beach brand. 2001 saw the introduction of James & Nicholson, a trendy proprietary brand which now stands for versatile, fashionable collections of high-quality promotional textiles for ever new target groups.

JCK opens up numerous possibilities

When James & Nicholson’s success in the promotional product market became apparent, JCK Holding offered to become a strong partner whose extensive network benefitted Daiber. Especially with regard to the increasingly stringent legal requirements, quality assurance and CSR, Daiber benefits from the infrastructure of the holding company. “Through the group, we have access to organisational staff as well as to factory controls and social compliance measures. This facilitates the management and ultimately serves the customer and the manufacturers,” explains Kai Gminder. The fact that Daiber also has extensive development opportunities under the umbrella of the holding company is demonstrated by the steady expansion of its product portfolio: With caps and accessories, promotional clothing, sportswear, workwear and a collection made of organic cotton, Daiber has achieved an impressive product range and depth.



THE CUSTOMER HAS TO SEE THAT PEOPLE ARE BEHIND THE COMPANY

Kai Gminder



Digitalisation intensified

The period of time that Kai Gminder looks back on underlines what enormous developments the textile finishing industry has experienced: “When I was young, embroidery machines were still analogue, embroidery designs were created using punched cards (hence the term embroidery card) and ribbons were threaded into the ma-

chine. I was always allowed to help.” Today, the entire process is digital: The data is transmitted as a PDF or eps file and then the motif is programmed (in the Far East). The finished file, which defines the stitch sequence, is then read directly into the WLAN-capable machine and embroidering can begin. “We notice that processing has become more technical and e-commerce is becoming increasingly important. We have done a lot of automation here to make things easier.” Over the past three or four years, Gminder has worked hard to keep up with technical development and digitalisation, and has achieved a lot in these areas. Whether it be the expansion of online distribution to multiple channels or the redesign of the shop – Daiber is very well positioned. He attaches great importance to the usability of the shop which is technically sophisticated and displays a lot of useful information (for example, availability). “The customer should enjoy using the shop and find it easy to use. However, an online platform should not be anonymous; you have to be able to recognise that there are people behind the system.” Therefore, there will be a complete relaunch of the B2B web shop in 2018.

Finally, Kai Gminder gives us a glimpse of his private life which, as he admits, is not always easy to reconcile with his entrepreneurial duties. He enjoys spending time with his family, and relaxes while flying – that, too, is part of the family tradition. Like his father, he is a qualified balloonist, glider pilot and power glider pilot. And when things get really hectic, he flies over the Alb during his lunch break and the world is alright again. <



Precise and fast: efficient embroidery machines finish textiles and caps. Daiber was one of the first companies to offer professional textile finishing on a grand scale.

