

MAKING OUR ORIGIN AND QUALITY VISIBLE THROUGH COMMUNICATIONS

**AN INTERVIEW WITH
EVA JAISLI, CEO, PB SWISS TOOLS**



"We realized that best publicity is when we can relate the history of the product and the brand in our name."

Hand tools from PB Swiss Tools are known throughout the world for durability, precision and reliability. These three values are also connected to "Swissness", which is why the Swiss origin plays an important role in brand management. The quality of our products and the ability to communicate this attribute effectively account for a major part of the success of our company.

In 1878, the foundation for today's PB Swiss Tools was laid. How has the brand developed since then?

Our high quality hand tools are still manufactured entirely in the company's own production plants in Emmental. When the opportunity to deliver products to Asia presented itself in the early 1960s, the phrase "Swiss Made" became increasingly important for us. Therefore, in 2005, we wanted to find out more as to what persuaded customers to choose our brand of products.

How did you go about it?

Together with the University of Bern, we carried out a wide-ranging investigation in which we surveyed our partners on every continent. We wanted to determine what constitutes the value of our brand from the customer's perspective.

What did you find out?

We found that the quality and the effective value of our products is of the greatest importance from the perspective of the users. Right in second place is reliability, which the brand conveys thanks to its origin ⁴³. It became clear that the phrase "Swiss Made" plays a central role. PB Swiss Tools develops and produces uncompromising Swiss quality. It is not for nothing that our motto is "Work with the best." That is why we can provide a lifetime warranty on our products.

What conclusions did you draw?

We asked ourselves where the points of contact with customers are, where not only the product but also our name plays a role. We realized that best publicity is when we can relate the history of the product and the brand in our name. As a consequence, we deleted the family name PB Baumann and instead used "Swiss" in the name of what is the most important: The tools. We kept the initials of pioneer Paul Baumann in the company name. That is the way that we told our story. It was very well received.

So it was an deliberate consideration to include Switzerland - a word that resonates - in the name?

Correct. It was important for us not to make this decision secretly in a little room here in Emmental; we wanted to take the results from the survey into account. The study has brought us an incredible amount of expertise. With Swiss as a concept, the brand name has been significantly enriched with the name change.

What other conclusions did you draw from the study?

It was also used to check if what we associate with Swissness is also what we put into our quality as values. In doing so, we came to the clear conclusion that durability, precision and reliability are what distinguish our products.

These three values are all in accord with the phrase "Swiss Made." This also convinced us to make the Swiss connection in the brand name.

How did your sales partners respond to this decision ?

The implementation was incredibly fast, which was a clear indication to us that the decision was correct. It seemed to me almost as if our partners had been waiting for it. This was certainly connected with the fact that we had involved our partners in the consultations regarding the name change. This gave them the opportunity to be prepared for this groundbreaking decision and thus to quickly implement the new corporate design.

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How have you implemented the brand name?

In bringing up the new corporate design, we carried out very precise work from the start. The new brand name was always associated with our values; that is, our corporate identity. Since these values were so well matched to each other, it was actually foreseeable that the new brand name was quickly used and well received.

Were there any stumbling blocks?

We quickly realized that we lacked emotional power on the whole. We therefore made a decision to create imagery. We created this key visual very carefully. We asked ourselves, "What will help our name?" What are the values that we can stand behind 100 percent? The key visual should express our values emotionally.

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What did the new imagery look like?

As an element of the corporate design, the motto "Work with the best" was crucial for the implementation. We staged the tools on the Sphinx, the high altitude research station for Jungfrauoch and Gornergrat. The motive for the alpine imagery was our common identity: The Jungfrauoch, as well as PB Swiss Tools, are to be noted with superlatives such as "best", "topmost" or "outstanding", in Europe and beyond.

How did you implement the connection between tools and the Jungfrauoch?

Features common to the Sphinx and PB Swiss Tools can be found at the highest point on the Jungfrauoch, 3580 meters above sea level: the research station defies wind, ice and cold, work goes on even in Arctic conditions. We wanted to show that our tools passed every endurance test: they can be used precisely, are long-lasting

and durable. Because of the fitting precision for each individual tool, safety and efficiency when working became a reality. Anyone who carries out screwdriving with a passion appreciates tools and instruments.

What role does the human factor play for the brand?

People are not interchangeable. To be a strong brand, it is also necessary to be personal brand and, very often at the end, there are faces that vouch for the brand. This is certainly an opportunity for SMEs since they are still often owner-managed in Switzerland and therefore the people are prepared, as owners, to take responsibility for the brand. The result is a personal brand that can strongly support and carry the corporate brand of a company.

What did the mix of theory and practice look like when building the brand?

The brand always needs both. On the one hand, theoretical thought patterns provide me with the possibility of picking up inspiration, and on the other hand, of checking what I determine more on an emotional level. This means that theory and practice are constantly having a dialog with each other. In the end, I must feel comfortable with both of them.

Which theoretical foundations supported brand building?

We used various theoretical frameworks. One is the corporate brand as the main keyword in the whole. In addition to this comes the entire concept of touchpoints ⁴⁴ as an important aid, particularly in the implementation of the corporate brand. We asked ourselves, "Where does the end user come into contact with the brand?" Today, we are also orienting ourselves towards DIYers, not just towards professionals. Keeping target groups in mind, we looked where the essential touchpoints are, where we are present and where we are not. Afterwards, along with

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our partners throughout the world, we determined the division of tasks, who would work on which touchpoint and how. This has helped us to rapidly obtain a certain area coverage at the start.

What significance do you attach to brand management?

This was reflected upon very carefully. For example, we defined a multi-channel strategy in 2015. There, the brand was at the center again and again. Specifically, for example as to the question of how we play on the various channels, which platforms we use and how we appear there.

Do you have a marketing department that checks these processes continually?

Yes, that we have. There is a corporate brand manager ⁴⁵ who keeps an eye on the brand. He is also responsible for the new annual catalog, where the key visual is clearly expressed. He ensures that the brand value is highlighted in the key visual, which in turn supports the value of our products.

How is the brand maintained?

In offline and online channels, sales agents from PB Swiss Tools market the products to end users or to the trades. They introduce the brand and maintain it with our support. The fact that we maintain partnerships for decades provides the opportunity to expand our market shares. We are also continually attracting new customers as we open up new markets.

What are the benefits that the company receives from the long-term partnerships?

These help the brand value and also to continually improve and optimize the brand identity. In this way, the partners ensure that the brand perception is adapted to the various target groups.

Can you give an example?

We can not address professionals and DIYers with the same imagery. That requires different imagery because customers move in different living environments. To some degree, the partners make use of the entire online world themselves, either by having their own online stores or by offering our products on various e-platforms.

In your opinion, what does it take, in general, to develop a strong brand?

First of all, the product value. In my opinion, there is not one brand that is not built on proven product value. Secondly, the experience with the brand. With digitalization, we have more new possibilities and playing fields than ever before.

What is the recipe for success for the PB Swiss Tools brand?

It is definitely the quality of the product that has accounted for its success. In addition is our ability to make this quality visible through our communications so that it is understood. Thirdly, we convey positive experiences that confirm the product quality and the reliability of the brand. With each innovation that we introduce into the market, with the range of products as a whole and the market presence of the brand, we prove our commitment to our promise: "Work with the best." We must continually concern ourselves with this core task.

How do you make quality tangibly visible?

In a time in which more and more companies sell their products based on price, we are rigorously focusing on quality. All PB Swiss Tools products are provided with a serial number. Thus all production stages, down to the raw materials used, can be traced back. That is the seal of approval for our unique quality.

Who works with your tools?

All the prominent Swiss industrial companies are among our customers: SBB, ABB, Stadler Rail, Schindler, etc. All the companies that also have a very strong presence in the export-oriented industries. There are also well-known

"The promise to fulfill once is good; the promise to honor over and over again is what makes us successful."

SMEs that are active in the skilled crafts and trades. They are professionals who use our products in their work as electricians, multi-skilled mechanics or engineers. They inspire us to continually develop our range of products. They confront us with expectations that our range of products have not yet fulfilled. Along with our development experts, we also visit workbenches in industry and the skilled crafts and trades, and ask, "What is it that is valued? What types of solutions will be needed in the future?"

What benefits do your products provide to these companies?

The choice of products that we offer with our quality tools allows the professionals in the industry to do outstanding work. In this sense,

we provide solutions that make others successful. It is the tool quality that decides whether the work that is carried out is better or worse, whether more or less time has to be spent, whether the work can be performed with high process and work safety. These are the criteria that contribute to the success of a company and distinguish the reliability of our brand. We do not manufacture machines - we manufacture tools for assembling machines and for keeping them running.

How does PB Swiss Tools ensure its revenues if its products never break?

Each year, we introduce new products. Innovations attract attention and are therefore also of significance for increasing sales. It is not only the innovative solutions that respond to customer expectations that are essential for growth. We enter new markets and build relationships with new sales partners. In this way, we secure access to new channels. To summarize, we use all the opportunities for successful development: Market penetration, market expansion and the expansion of our product range.

What is the reason for customer service if the products are so high-grade that practically no repairs are necessary?

It is true: Due to the high quality of our products, we receive practically no customer complaints. If we do, then it is usually because the products are used incorrectly. Nevertheless, customer service plays an important role. A premium tool needs premium service. Period. With our customer service, we can ensure that the customer has the product at hand just when he needs it. This means absolute reliability in regards to delivery as well as a delivery service that guarantees that the right product is delivered. It is, of course, our responsibility that we choose those sales partners that can meet this high level of service.

What is the key factor in your customer service?

Direct response is the best. Online channels are very important in our communications. Today, the customer wants immediate answers to his questions. Answers have to be specific, technically sound and professional. This is what has absolutely been tried and tested over time.

You are present in more than 70 countries. How do you ensure that customer service works equally well everywhere?

Let's take China as an example. For this market, we have a subsidiary that manages PB Swiss Tools in Shanghai. This means that we have a warehouse and a team of experts on-site that advises end customers and sales agents. This team includes a sales organization and warehouse management personnel for ensuring just-in-time deliveries.

Keyword digitalization: What role do the new media play at PB Swiss Tools?

Brand management via social media has its meaning. Especially with our requirement to sell products to professionals, semi-professionals and DIYers. As a prerequisite, we need to know the way in which different target groups obtain their information. How do they assess our products and services? In the meantime, social media have become reliable information platforms and, on the other hand, they are important for the final sales.

How is this implemented?

We use social media channels carefully. With the establishment of a multi-channel strategy, we have installed a "forward gear." We want more interactions that are well thought out with our interest groups. We want to achieve a presence for our company on LinkedIn or Xing. We use Facebook for storytelling⁴⁶ and for linking various promotions. In addition, we have a blog that promotes interactions.

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What are the challenges associated with these digital means of communication?

Globalization, which opens up both opportunities and risks for successful development. If a DIYer in America makes a film while doing a great job with our tools and puts this video on YouTube, then he promotes brand awareness. It may also happen that a negative message is conveyed. In that case, we have to respond immediately, which requires the necessary capacity.

How do you monitor how the brand is presented online?

Our partners are present throughout the world in more than 70 countries. They support us in keeping an eye on the communication channels and in furnishing them with the right information.

What are the trends in the customer service?

Differentiation is the keyword here. As an export-oriented Swiss SME, we have the best opportunities if we can successfully position ourselves with name-brand products in market niches. Because our products are sold on

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quality and not on price, we focus on the high-end customer segments, which can be found in product niches and not in the mass market. Just as we do now, we will rely on quality in the future and, at the same time, guarantee competitive prices.

*"We use
social media channels
carefully."*

That sounds very confident.

We check our performance based on customer satisfaction and competitiveness. We check our product and brand value benchmarked against our competitors. In the process, the anchoring in the domestic market plays a crucial role. The Swiss tool market is promoted by international tool manufacturers. We claim the largest market share. In this way, we gain the necessary momentum for the product niches in the export market.

So you are increasingly specializing in niche areas and have penetrating power there?

You say specialize, I think differentiate. In everything that we make, we have to keep the competitive situation in mind. We need to be one step ahead of the global players and we must not be afraid to prove it with the products that we offer.

As a final summary: What is your advice regarding brand management and customer service for companies, especially for young entrepreneurs?

The value of the product must be proven and credibly communicated. Appropriate communication measures should be taken that correlate with the brand. The agreement between brand core values (UAPs) and the unique selling propositions for the brand must be consistent. The brand is the flagship and conveyor of performance advantages that are offered with the products and services. Established companies and startups are challenged to apply the professionalism and patience that is required to meet these challenges.

EVA JAISLI

Eva Jaisli, who was born in 1958, has been the CEO of PB Swiss Tools since 1997; she and her husband have owned and run the company during the fourth generation.

First occupation as a trained teacher with additional training in psychology/social work and business administration (Master's) as well as an MBA in international marketing.

Family life: Married, four children

Education: Studies in psychology/social work, postgraduate business administration, MBA in international marketing.

She has an honorary doctorate from the economics faculty of the University of Bern.

Leisure: Spending time in outdoor activities with family and friends.

Eva Jaisli is on the Board and Executive Committee of the Swissmem industrial association, on the Board of the Swiss Association for Quality and Management Systems (SQS) and is the Vice President of Switzerland Global Enterprise (S-GE). She is Chair of the Board of the Regionalspital Emmental Service AG.

PB SWISS TOOLS

PB Swiss Tools develops and produces uncompromising Swiss quality: Precise, durable and reliable. Anybody who drives screws professionally will appreciate these excellent tools and instruments. Work with the best.

The cornerstone of the company was laid in 1878. Today, the company employs around 150 people and produces around 10 million units per year. Two thirds of these units are exported. The main export markets are Europe, Asia, America, and a subsidiary in Shanghai, China.

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