

INSPIRING WITH PASSION

Interview | Remo Bernardi, CEO of Impag, not only points out 2016's hottest personal care trends. He also explains in this interview what strategy to expect from the company in the future.



► **Interview partner:**
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COSSMA: What are the major trends you identified in the field of personal care for 2016?

REMO BERNARDI: The quick-lived, innovation-hungry European beauty industry is strongly influenced by trends from other consumer segments, by medicine or by developments in trendsetting countries, such as South Korea. One current inspiration from the food industry is “Detox”, which will become a stronger trend in skin and hair care. New active ingredients detoxify the skin at the cellular level and thus help to restore new energy and youthfulness. South Korea has crystallised as a new Asian trendsetter. Just as we have small mobile phone stores populating the town centres in Europe, we find a multitude of

little beauty shops mushrooming in South Korea, pushing a cornucopia of new beauty ideas into the market. Mega-sellers such as the CC, BB and DD creams and face masks have already conquered the European market, and anti-pollution will also enjoy a success story in skin and hair care. The times of concealers that sit heavily and mask-like on the skin are long gone. Today, we can achieve a pleasantly light texture with immediate correction of skin blemishes using new, refined texturisers for perfectly radiant, “photoshopped” skin.

Given strongly growing demand for formulations with “free from” claims, the claim “sulphate-free” will soon catch on stronger in the hair and body cleansing segment as well as in the mass market. The aspect of multifunctionality

is being expanded upon in decorative cosmetics, since consumers are valuing not only beautifying benefits, but also, increasingly, skin caring and protective effects. In sun care, the focus will always be on the highest possible sun protection factor, but products with a stable, light and caring texture will become trendy. Zinc oxide, which has proven itself so well in sun cosmetics, will experience a revival in this segment once the approval process at the European level is finally concluded.

COSSMA: What is your future strategy for cosmetics?

REMO BERNARDI: We are using targeted investments to strengthen our cosmetic teams at the subsidiaries in Germany, France, Poland and Switzerland. The next step will be opening our Application Laboratory in Offenbach in the first quarter of 2016. Cosmetic raw materials and active ingredients want to be experienced and appreciated with all the senses. The activities at our lab will give our sales teams and

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customers new opportunities to experience the advantages of our products, and thus boost their creativity and be forever ready for timely product launches. We will develop high-quality and innovative formulations for skin and hair care. We will also do everything we can to further expand our position with creative ideas and concepts while also promoting innovations – thus making us the preferred partner for our stakeholders.

COSSMA: How is your innovation management structured in the field of cosmetics?

REMO BERNARDI: In line with our corporate values, our commitment is to increase our innovative power and to harmonise it with the trends and needs of the market. We keep in close contact with our supply partners, whom we select very targetedly. The activities of the new Application Laboratory are being planned and coordinated by the international formulation team, which currently has nine members from Germany, Poland, France and

Switzerland. The team is supported by two product developers, each contributing their long-standing formulation experience. Our specialists also search around the world for innovative raw materials, concepts and ideas that allow our customers to develop modern formulations and thus remain competitive.

COSSMA: When was the company founded?

REMO BERNARDI: Impag was founded in Zürich in 1919, which means we will be celebrating the 100th anniversary fairly soon. This century of company history was characterised by continuity



“Only if every single one of our employees can develop with enjoyment will they convey their enthusiasm to our customers. We strive every day to create the necessary environment for our employees”

and advancement at the same time. **Impag Germany** came along in the seventies, followed by **Impag Poland** and **Impag France** after the turn of the millennium, and now just recently **Impag Austria**.

COSSMA: What are the company's main activities?

REMO BERNARDI: We started out as a trading company for the Swiss textile industry. Over the years, via the branches of base chemicals and fuels, our company developed into an international raw materials supplier focussed on its core competences in the segments of Personal Care, Nutrition & Health and Chemicals & Metals.

COSSMA: What led a procurement organisation for the Swiss textile industry to embark on activities in the field of cosmetics?

REMO BERNARDI: When the company was founded a hundred years ago, all activities revolved around the procurement of raw materials for the textile

“IT IS NOT OUR AIM TO BE THE BIGGEST,
BUT TO BECOME LOCALLY THE BEST”

Remo Bernardi, CEO, Impag



industry in Switzerland. Through a strategic supply partner who served Impag with textile raw materials, we were able to take advantage of the first opportunities in the Personal Care segment at the time. This cooperation is one of our longest-lasting partnerships, and has held now for more than 50 years. The Personal Care activities were then purposefully expanded over the last 30 years, and led to the opening of our subsidiaries and the resulting penetration into the cosmetics industry.

COSSMA: What have been major milestones in the field of cosmetics?

REMO BERNARDI: An important step in our Group's development was the management buyout in 1993, and the resulting independence and strategic realignment. Strategic focussing on the cosmetics industry led to the establishment of the business units in the countries mentioned. And, as already mentioned, we will be opening our Application Laboratory in Offenbach at the beginning of 2016.

COSSMA: What is your company's philosophy?

REMO BERNARDI: At the core of our company's philosophy are our corporate values. We do everything in our power to demonstrate our expertise to our market partners: we inspire them with our passion, impress them with our integrity and make our mark through respectful cooperation – always with enthusiasm towards the job and towards others. People come first. Primarily our employees. Only if every single one of our employees can develop with enjoyment will they convey their enthusiasm to our customers and supply partners and be successful. We strive every day to create the necessary environment for our employees.

I'm not saying that Impag is the perfect workplace in every respect, or that it's the ideal distribution company. Like everyone, we too have made our mistakes over the years, and we will make more. But we set high standards. And we hold high expectations of ourselves and try to keep the humanity in sight in managing the company each day. Personal communication is important to us here. Workgroups work intensively on identifying and developing as many synergies across national borders as possible. And once a year, all the employees from all the countries gather together for one day, far away from the ordinary day-to-day business. This special day strengthens the community and inspires everyone towards new action.

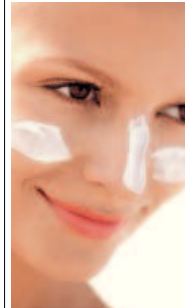
COSSMA: In how many countries are you active?

REMO BERNARDI: We are active in five countries with subsidiaries in each. The head office is in Switzerland. Our subsidiaries in Germany, Poland, Austria and France stay in close contact with the head office and, alongside their native markets, also work the Eastern European countries and Russia.

COSSMA: How many employees do you have in each office?

REMO BERNARDI: The number of employees has steadily grown to 120 employees at present. Of these, 70 work in Switzerland and 25 in Germany. The companies in Warsaw, Nancy and Vienna are relatively small, but are also developing successfully and sustainably. From a strategic perspective, internationalisation is crucial for our company's successful development.

COSSMA: What are the main challenges of working as a distributor and how do you cope with them?



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NEW LAB

The new Application Laboratory in Offenbach, to be opened in the first quarter of 2016, will help customers and sales teams experience cosmetic raw materials and active ingredients with all the senses

REMO BERNARDI: With the proliferation of electronic media, market transparency is growing and, with that, so are the demands on distributors. More than ever, distributors are having to prove their relevance in the eyes of suppliers and customers alike. This motivates us to offer our business partners added value with technological expertise, marketing concepts, advice on regulations and transfer of innovation. The future challenge lies in the market conditions and unforeseeable influences that are changing at an ever-increasing rate.

COSSMA: How can you compete with distributor chains who work globally?

REMO BERNARDI: The key advantage is in our company's size. Unlike giant groups, our management culture has the scale, structure and processes to allow great flexibility and rapidity. In our group, the performance of each individual counts. We cannot afford weak points, downtime and inefficiency. We offer creative employees a platform on which to develop and successfully implement their own entrepreneurship. I see it as my most important duty to gain the best people for our company, to develop them into top performers with the greatest possible freedom and then to keep out of their way. Success is not sustainable if it is defined by how big one is. So it is not our aim to be the biggest; rather, it is our daily endeavour to become unique and locally the best. The choice of supply partners is also crucial in this. Targeted selection allows us to provide each of our suppliers with the necessary resources for success. This creates long-lasting, successful partnerships based on trust, mutual respect and practiced fairness. □

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“LIMITLESS POTENTIAL”

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