

Brand Manager of the Year

Henning Strauss

STRAUSS



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of the year

Interview with Henning Strauss

1. With Strauss, you have made the shift from a workwear brand to a cult brand for workwear. What strategy did you implement to achieve this, what is your formula for success?

A cult brand can only be one if brand management in the company is high on the agenda. The brand must be perceptible down to the last detail and be experienced at all touchpoints. The more this is implemented, the more it is possible to charge the brand with meaning and a high quality of experience. Because in order to generate emotion, you have to create experiences - and give space to seemingly insignificant details. To put it simply: brand programmes feelings onto a logo. It activates all the senses - in strong images, tactile, auditory, online, offline. Of course, the corresponding product must also be present. Just nice packaging is not enough here. Brand management is perhaps the management tool of all. Brand paints a vision of the future that ideally is so appealing that



the entire organisation moves towards it. I like to talk about leadership by branding.

2. How can the implementation of a brand relaunch in a family-run company be imagined?

It is in the nature of family businesses that their members have a very personal relationship with the logo and brand claim. It is not uncommon for the logo to become the family crest - and thus exert a strong influence on the family itself. After all, one stands for it with their name, and thus also for the values of the company. Changing the corporate identity is therefore a very emotional issue. A relaunch is at best a joint decision. Our family is extremely consensual, which is why we quickly come to a conclusion on such issues. I can only recommend that, ideally, all family members should be involved in such a decision. Because brands need consistency and common ground. Nevertheless, there has to be a decision-maker who takes it upon himself to implement the new brand identity in all areas. In the case of Strauss, that was me.

3. The expansion of the product range was certainly a big deal...what processes are behind it?

It always depends on what opportunities present themselves in the market, what the customer demands or wants, for example, as a functional addition. From a brand perspective, it's about creating products that give the brand an addition-

al emotional charge. One example is the expansion of the product range to include collections for children. To a certain extent, they are sympathy carriers and brand ambassadors. In the case of the cargo configurator, it intensifies the interaction with Strauss. A meet and greet with the brand, in a way. With us, the customer decides on the look of his Strauss work trousers or how he wants to arrange the pockets. That has something of a personal relationship. And leads to an even stronger identification with the brand.

4. How do you implement the theme of design in the company?

At Strauss, brand has always been lived from the inside out. We have an in-house team that combines the most important creative disciplines. Together with the specialist departments and external partners, new products or other components of the brand work are then developed and produced. Constantly reinventing ourselves is part of our brand essence.

5. The theme of craftsmanship is always at the forefront of your products. How do you integrate this into your brand work?

Strauss work trousers with their pockets are the analogue user interface for many. Here, it's all about suitability for work. And the whole thing in a contemporary design. Our products are a hymn to craftsmanship. That's why we pay loving attention to

detail: from the ceiling lighting in our stores, which is made of tools, to the option to design your own work trousers. This is our belief in the industry, which we show our appreciation for with our products.

6. You started with a catalogue many years ago. What role does online marketing play for you today? What has changed?

We are one of Germany's leading online players and appreciate the advantages of online marketing: strong segmentation of target groups, high interactivity, precise control of our advertising messages, targeted analysis of campaigns. Digital competence is above everything at Strauss. Nevertheless, we have an almost romantic relationship with our print media and feel that many of our customers share this analogue longing. For us, the catalogue is a cult. And because our customers also see it that way, it is still favourite reading material in workshops and screwdrivers' cellars - and today probably even at the coffee table and in children's rooms.

7. Could it be interesting for you in the future to also distribute your products via retail platforms?

Sales via retail platforms are not currently planned in our product calculation.

8. Mail order is not everything in your business. There are also workwear stores...

We opened our first flagship store in 2010. The Strauss workwear stores are worlds of experience and our homage to the craft. Our appreciation for the industry is evident in every detail. In addition to online business, we will continue to present our products live and in colour. Because handicraft is haptic, tangible, handy. We have supplemented this concept with pop-up stores in major European cities. We are currently working on a pop-up store for kids in Frankfurt's My Zeil, which will open in September.

9. Being an entrepreneur also means taking social responsibility: how do you integrate the topic of sustainability into your brand work?

Workwear as such is sustainable, as one of its key promises is its longevity. The environment in which our products are created is therefore more than significant for us. We express our belief with special projects in Bangladesh, one of our most important production countries: with the CI Factory Chatto-gram, our design and development campus for workwear in the south of the country, the implementation of the world's first professorship for sustainability and textile innovation at Ahsanullah University in Dhaka or the construction of a school together with Don Bosco Mission. But we are also committed here on the ground. In North Hessen, for example, we protect 1,000 giant trees. In our social report, we talk about our commitment every year, in a deliberately non-promotion-

al way. This leads to a deeper understanding of our work and strengthens trust in our company.

10. In Germany you are known as THE brand for workwear. You are also very active abroad, Strauss can be called an international brand with a clear conscience. Are there significant differences in brand work here?

It is true that the work world differs from country to country. But we are always us. Strauss is Strauss - whether on the Main or the Mekong.

11. You are very active with your brand in the area of cooperation and sponsoring, both nationally and internationally. Tell us something about it...

With live sporting events, we reach a very large target group in one go, because many of our customers are big sports fans. Over the years, Strauss has launched many exciting collaborations with great partners: UEFA and DFB, the Stuntmen's Association in Hollywood, FC Bayern Munich, the men's and women's national football teams, Metallica, the Kansas City Chiefs, Nintendo or most recently the production crew on the set of Fast & Furious. We have been relying on strong images and the big screen in our advertising productions for around 15 years. Through my studies in Los Angeles, I have a personal connection and love for the film and entertainment industry.

12. So, Strauss is always good for an amazing surprise - what can we look forward to next?

(laughs) I would love to equip the crew of the mission to the red planet.

PRESS CONTACT

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