

04/29/2020 Einblicke Insight

Interview with Ralf Hildenbrand, President Americas at Siegwerk: How he sees the future of packaging

Ralf Hildenbrand has lately taken over the President Americas function at Siegwerk. He gave us some insights into his new area of responsibility, his future vision for packaging and the challenges the packaging and ink industries are facing in the coming years.



How do you like your new area of responsibility as President Americas?

After having spent the first 20 years of my professional life in Europe and the following 11 in Asia, I am very happy and grateful to have gotten the opportunity of being responsible for our North- and South America business.

I am embracing this new cultural experience and working with my new team. It is a pleasure and great honor to lead such seasoned professionals and support them with the know-how, experiences, and insights I have gathered over the last years. I believe our team has a good balance of shared spirit, vision, and complementing expertise. And these traits make me confident that we can build

on the great work accomplished here in the past to bring our business to new heights in the future.

Would you say that you already feel adapted to the new environment after moving from Asia to the US?

Throughout my 30 years with Siegwerk, I often travelled to this part of the world. One of my first customer responsibilities brought me to the States in 2001 for the first time. These insights and experiences really helped me to gain a foothold. On top of that, and most importantly, my team, the customers and our market partners have made me feel very welcomed here which really facilitated the transition.

And also, privately we quickly found new acquaintances and I believe we are on a good way to also gain new friends. Although the current situation is making those first social encounters very difficult at the moment, my wife Tina and I are very optimistic that our time here will be as enriching and enjoyable as our time was in Asia. We are blessed to be able to see and experience this wonderfully diverse world.

What is your personal future vision for packaging?

Not only am I a passionate “Siegwerker” and “Inky” with “heart and soul” – but I also deeply believe in the great value contribution of packaging for mankind. And as such, I am very happy and satisfied that I have been able to contribute to position us very well in this market over the past 20 years. I believe in the continuity of our leading role and see a bright future for our company, our Siegworkers, our customers and our shareholders.

Nevertheless, we also recognize the “post-consumer plastic waste” challenges we face today, and especially the ocean plastic crisis. Therefore, two years ago, I committed myself to driving our Circular Economy Strategy, hence making Siegwerk an enabler for circular packaging solutions. I am delighted and very

grateful for the strong support shown by all stakeholders, be it our owners, my colleagues or all the Siegwerkers, for this mission. Circularity is the solution to maintain and even increase the importance and value of packaging – and to solve the current environmental challenges. Honestly, I am very excited about our future – and our contribution to that solution.

What would you say are the biggest challenges facing the packaging and ink industries in the coming years? And what are the biggest opportunities and how is Siegwerk positioned to be successful?

One challenge is definitely Sustainability and the creation of a circular packaging industry. To close the current linear chain to a loop is the biggest challenge, since it is such a “systemic” issue and needs the engagement and collaboration of the whole value chain. However, at the same time I believe it is also a huge opportunity. A crisis - times of difficulty - is when important decisions are made. These decisions lead to change, and change opens the window for opportunities. I am confident that we have already made some good decisions. Looking forward, I am optimistic that we can spot the right opportunities and embrace change effectively.

Another big disrupter that will evoke change and create opportunities is digitization. Digitization is fundamentally changing the way we live and work - how we communicate, collaborate, produce, distribute and consume. The current COVID 19 crisis is boosting this (r)evolution further and to an unanticipated degree. Digitization has the potential to strongly and sustainably impact and change the way we develop, manufacture and sell packaging. It can offer opportunities that include enablers and accelerators of circularity. We already have a very strong commitment and strategy in place that was passionately driven by Herbert from very early on. Together, we are working on very exciting projects for all stages of the packaging life cycle – and there are definitely more to come.

All of us at Siegwirk are excited and passionate about both mega trends – and this will drive and enable us to become a circular and digital packaging solution provider – as we aspire in our Agenda 2025.

Short term, however, we have to cope with a huge threat to our health, our economies and our way of living. The COVID 19 crisis has only just begun and will undoubtedly be disruptive. And although we cannot tell whether the decisions that were made were the best way to deal with it, I remain optimistic – convinced – that we will make it through coming out stronger and matured.

This crisis proves our Siegwirk strategy and positioning works! During this difficult time, our production workers and all other Siegwirkers, who keep our operations and services up and running, are Siegwirker role-models at its finest. To this unparalleled challenge, they respond with responsibility, dedication and a great deal of integration and cooperation - deserving our deepest gratitude and respect. I am very proud to be part of our Siegwirk family.

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