

Our Italian distributor

ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCE WITH EXTER



INTERVIEW

JEAN BERNARD ARZENO

QORES

By Anne-Laure Gauthier

Jean Bernard has worked with Exter products for 21 years, last year his company Qores won the Distributor Award in Italy. His country was deeply affected by Covid-19. We spoke with him about his personal experiences during the lockdown, the impact on the business and the changed consumer needs in food.

What is your role within Qores?

I am Sales Director within Qores. This is what is said on the organigram, but my ambition and my passion is to be a source of knowledge for my youngest colleagues. I believe that you earn esteem and respect from other people from your way of behaving and your way of doing. This is what I thrive to do in Qores. I have reached my objective to define my job as I really like it, and I would

like to pass this on to the youngest generation. I am convinced that the way Qores is doing business is a winning model, and I want to ensure the continuity of this model.

How would you define Qores as a company and what is your business model?

Qores business model is based upon services connected to distribution. We have noticed that with the consumer needs

'Our consultancy service is highly appreciated by customers'

changing faster than even, the regulatory environment being more and more challenging and with technology and product offering becoming more and more complex, our customers need above all a consultancy service around a solution. The product in itself is only one part of what our customers need. So we have developed a model around four pillars: (1) Distribution, (2) R&D support, (3) Regulatory support and (4) Marketing support.

FOR EXAMPLE

When I go to a customer to talk about a vegan burger, I explain him how to make such a burger. What is needed in terms of ingredients: taste, texture and preservation. But also, how they can produce it. What are the challenges they might face in their factory? I explain what the regulatory challenges; What is accepted and what is not? Why can't they call it a beef burger? What is the creative solution around the labelling of ingredients? I show him information to help get priority for this project: what does the vegan burger market look like, who are the biggest players, how much is this market worth in Italy?

CONSULTANCY SERVICE

We need to help our customer move our projects forward by showing them that it's worth their time. At the end, the customer will buy the product from me, but what he likes the most is the consultancy service around the sell. And this consultancy approach is what makes Qores unique today because it comes from the experience of our people and from our relationship with customers.

'Winning the Distributor Award was a very nice recognition for all these years of hard work to promote Exter products on the Italian market'

You have been working together with Exter people and products for many years. How do you look back at the cooperation with Exter?

Basically, I have worked with Exter products since I started my career. Winning the Distributor Award last year was a very nice recognition for all these years of hard work to promote Exter products on the Italian market.

EXTER: A COMPANY THAT IS WILLING TO CHANGE AND ADAPT

When I look back, I see Exter has been a company that has continuously evolved and improved over the years. This is very clear that John and Paul Bruggink have invested in the growth of Exter with a new vision and new business models. Lots of very nice products have been launched, in line with the latest trends. There is also a clear investment in people, especially younger people. It shows a company that is modern and willing to change and adapt. Real entrepreneurs know how to take risks. Paul and John Bruggink had the guts to take them and it looks pretty successful. Compliment!

'I would like to thank the Exter team for the work that has been done around the Organic topic. I am convinced this is a trend that will remain, and for which we have a good potential'

The impact of Covid-19 in Italy

and the effects on the business and Qores

How did you run the business in these circumstances?

We spent time putting in place a good organization, it looks like we went through this critical period rather well. We implemented a rotation in the Production and in the Lab. People were always working with the same colleagues to limit the amount of contacts between people. Logistics was very challenging. Truckdrivers from Northern Europe were not willing to come to Italy because they would be put in quarantine when they return to their country. Organizing the deliveries from Zaandam to Milan was a nightmare.

How was your business impacted?

We serve customers who work mostly for the Retail market. Our demand increased tremendously in March and April by +35% to +40%. It has been a real challenge because I had limited availability of people due to the fact that we were limiting the contact between our operators, so we could not assign more people to one shift. The consequence is that our factory workers had to work very hard. I have to thank everybody in Qores for their commitment, which has been and is still very high.

Was there a change in requests?

We had a huge increase of the demand for a bouillon paste. It goes into bouillon cubes.

The demand was multiplied by four! This is because in this period, consumers preferred to buy bouillon cubes again, instead of the more premium solutions like liquid bouillons. On the other hand, we had a decrease of demand for all ingredients used in fresh products, like ready meals. Interesting is the sudden demand for frankfurter sausages. There was an erosion of the consumption of frankfurter sausages in Italy for many years because consumers believe it is over-processed. Italian consumers went back to eat frankfurter sausages during the lockdown. And they discovered frozen pizzas. Almost all the frozen pizzas produced in Italy are exported. Italian consumers would prefer to get their pizza from the pizzeria around the corner.

Which changes in your business will remain in the long run?

I believe that lots of aspects will remain. For example, this crisis has accelerated tremendously the digitalization of companies but also of households. There were still houses without internet access in Italy. The ease to buy online, for grocery shopping but also for the rest of the goods will also remain. Only 6 to 7% of consumers were using online shopping before. The Italian consumer is very traditional, so there was a lack of interest and above all a lack of trust towards online shopping. This had limited

the development. Now most Italians are convinced that online shopping is a good option. The sad news is that the Italian economy will probably be deeply affected by this crisis, with a result of lower ability or willingness to spend by the Italian consumers. This might slow down the acceptance of new products, especially innovative/ premium products. On the positive side, I believe that this crisis will help to have an increased care for our environment, for our territory, for the national preference. We have seen a surge of nationalism during the lockdown, with Italian flags hung on houses. Prior to this, you would see Italian flags only for the Football World Championship! I am sure that the Italian origin of products will be more valued in an attempt by the consumers to stimulate our economy.