

A KNOWLEDGE OF PURCHASING MODELS to satisfy consumers

by Alessandra Ferretti

Michael Zink, what are the main characteristics of the German Tile Distributors' Association, of which you are chairman?

We see ourselves as a hub for manufacturers, specialist publishers, consumers and architects and act accordingly. Only this way can we be an active player in the ceramic tile chain of value so as to be able to recommend semi-finished tiles as finished products for sale.

We see our task as “marketing” tile, increasing its acceptance on the part of end consumers and therefore constantly increasing sales with respect to other kinds of floor and wall coverings. Our core competences include product presentation and consultation, warehouse and transport logistics, product scouting, trend forecasting and market expansion. We try to perform these activities both through local entrepreneurs and through the work of our association.

We also work closely with other German and European associations and with national and European organisations of tile manufacturers. One such example is our collaboration with Confindustria Ceramica. We greatly appreciate its support with our public relations activities and its invitations and hospitality at Cersaie.

What are the trends in today's tile market?

Today the market is evolving in accordance with the zeitgeist. The age of total information is having a direct influence on marketing in the ceramic sector. With the advent of

the internet, websites, social media and B2B, today we must adapt our communications to customers but also to our intermediaries.

Our association has launched a pilot project called “Ausstellung 2020” in cooperation with the Federation of European tile fixers' associations EUF, which involves investigating the influence of communication and information on the purchasing process.

But tile market trends are also strongly influenced by the enormous changes that are occurring in terms of consumer awareness. What we can refer to as value-driven consumption is clearly more demanding than product-driven consumption. In other words, customers are demanding further benefits in addition to the core characteristics determined by the product's function. To give a couple of examples: it is not sufficient for a refrigerator to cool its contents, it must do so with low energy consumption; food must be tasty but at the same time it must be healthy and free from contaminants; and so on.

In what direction is the tile industry heading in Germany?

Right from the start our association recognised the trend towards value-driven consumption I described above. So with the help of Confindustria, we gave our full support to



Mr. Micheal Zink

promoting the initiative “Healthy living with ceramics” (“Gesundes Wohnen mit Keramik”: <http://www.gesundes-wohnen-mit-keramik.eu/>).

Through this operation we are certain that we will be able to give customers the answers they want in terms of added value of the product. But we also run risks, largely due to the lack of well-

trained professionals in the specialist publishing sector. So once again our association took the initiative and set up the VDF Academy (“VDF-Akademie”), an information portal that illustrates the most important standards for training for the tile trade and tile manufacturers.

What could Italian companies do to gain greater popularity in Germany?

The fact that Italian manufacturers are the market leaders in many countries, including Germany, is due not only to their creativity and design expertise, but also their courtesy in dealing with customers. In particular, if Italian companies continue to pursue a coherent sales policy that takes account of regional characteristics, I see a bright future for our collaboration.

Of course we aren't perfect. We can and must remain active and continue to focus on the market and on customer trends. We consider this our constant and – I hope – shared goal.

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