

A QUARTER OF A CENTURY OF SUCCESS!



“EVEN AFTER 25 YEARS, BRAND AND PACKAGING DESIGN IS AS EXCITING AS IT WAS AT THE VERY START”, SAYS KLAUS P. HAJOK, WHO CELEBRATES THE AGENCY’S 25TH ANNIVERSARY THIS YEAR.

In this interview, the designer and entrepreneur reveals how HAJOK Design grew from being a one-man show to one of the most successful branding agencies in Germany. We also learn what has changed in the industry and which achievement Klaus P. Hajok is particularly proud of.

01. WHAT MADE YOU SET UP HAJOK DESIGN BACK IN 1997?

Before I turned 15 I already knew I wanted to be a graphic designer. I gained an insight into the profession through my uncle and my mind was made up early on: one day I wanted to do the same thing and be my own boss. After studying design, I gained my first experience in agencies and came into contact with packaging design, which really inspired me. In my early 30s, without having a business plan, I tried my luck by starting my own company in the design world.

I GAINED MY FIRST EXPERIENCE IN AGENCIES

02. WHO WERE YOUR FIRST CLIENTS?

At first I worked for various agencies as well as directly for clients such as Garpa (catalogue design for high-quality garden furniture), designing smaller projects for Deutsche Spar as well as the first small packaging design projects for Lever Fabergé (Unilever).

03. WHAT WERE YOUR GOALS BACK THEN?

I wanted to be independent, enjoy my work and be able to make a living as a graphic designer. It was only when I actually had too much to do that I started thinking about how to continue long-term. My previous concept soon no longer matched reality, so I summoned up all my courage and founded first a studio and two years later the agency. I rented rooms, hired my first employees and thus took on responsibility for others. That was the basis for today's agency. Some colleagues from back then still work at HAJOK Design today!

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04. WHAT HAVE BEEN THE MOST IMPORTANT MILESTONES IN THE PAST 25 YEARS?

The growth of the agency has been an evolution and not a revolution. There have been many steps, rather than “one giant leap”. The first large private label project for Globus in 2011 was certainly very important, since this enabled us to manage the special challenges of large-scale product ranges. This was followed by even larger projects for branded goods and retail. In this way, the agency grew as the projects became larger and more complex.

05. HOW HAS THE IMPORTANCE OF PACKAGING DESIGN IN THE MARKETING MIX CHANGED OVER THE PAST 25 YEARS?

Often the packaging design is the only brand communication, or at least the most important part. The packaging has to look great, but also be attention-grabbing, inform the consumer plus tell the product and brand story all on-pack! More than ever, packaging has become the essence of the brand.

06. HAVE CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS CHANGED IN THE LAST 25 YEARS?

Absolutely! Target groups are more diverse than ever with each group having its own needs, which often overlap or are in a state of flux. Packaging design has to tell stories and meet a wide range of communication requirements. In the FMCG sector, consumers no longer choose between conventional or private-label brands, but between strong and weak brands.

07. WHAT CHANGES HAS THE PANDEMIC BROUGHT TO THE BUSINESS?

As in most industries, where the work is actually done has become less important. We were able to quickly switch to working from home and only a few colleagues were in the agency the whole time. Business trips have been almost completely eliminated and video conferencing has become one of the most important parts of our work. Luckily most of our clients' businesses have been successful during the pandemic and so we've had a lot to do throughout this period. Ultimately, this situation has not been an obstacle for acquiring new projects and new clients, either.

08. WHAT ARE YOU PARTICULARLY PROUD OF?

I am very proud of 25 years of success in the design heartland of Hamburg. Going from being a one-man graphic-design studio to an established design agency with an impressive client portfolio, from local champions to global players, was often hard work and required a lot of resilience. Our cases, and above all the wonderful and very talented employees, make me proud; without them the whole thing would not have been possible. Good people attract more good people!

FROM LOCAL CHAMPIONS TO GLOBAL PLAYERS

09. DO YOU HAVE ANY FAVOURITE DESIGNS CREATED AT HAJOK?

No. I evaluate design in many-faceted ways and recognise when a design does a great job, even if it doesn't look spectacular at first glance. I am also equally happy with the "shining stars", for which we have won a number of awards. A brand's vision and strategy are brought to life by good packaging design.

10. WHAT MAKES THE HAJOK TEAM STAND OUT?

"Teamwork makes the dream work". This is our motto and it describes us very well. A bunch of individual stars can only perform well in the Champions League if they play well together as a team. Every top talent has to be good at their job, but at the end of the day you win the game as a team.

11. IS THERE AN ANECDOTE FROM THE EARLY YEARS THAT YOU STILL LIKE TO THINK BACK TO?

My parents were always very down-to-earth and had little to do with design. They were a bit unsure about what I was actually doing in Hamburg. When I explained to my mother that we designed packaging for grocers and drug-stores, after a short pause, she said in a worried voice: "But the supermarkets are already full of packaging!"

12. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO ANYONE SETTING UP AN AGENCY TODAY?

There is no perfect moment, make the moment perfect. An agency is a marathon race, not a sprint. Pace yourself. It will be exhausting and stormy, but it can be worth it. No one can guarantee anything; believe in the idea and in yourself.

13. WHAT DO YOU WISH FOR THE FUTURE OF HAJOK DESIGN?

I wish the agency and our wonderful team at least another 25 successful years!



DESIGN IS



ROCK 'N' ROLL



ON WHITE



PAPER!

