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It's a family affair: Family-owned männer excels

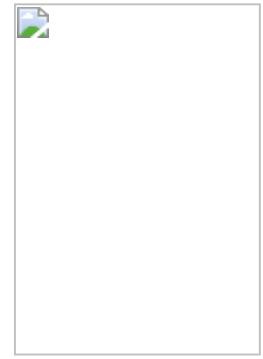
by: Yvonne Kloepping in Business on March 17, 2009

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There's no business like family business, especially in times of financial crisis. These companies often have a significant advantage in equity capital and longevity versus other types of ownership.

According to a recent study published by a leading German economic research institute, about 95% of Germany-based companies are family-run. These businesses contribute about 41.5% to the overall turnover and provide 57% of all jobs in the country, the survey states.

"There are many advantages to being a family business," says Hans-Peter Männer, president and CEO at mold and hot



runner manufacturer männer (Bahlingen, Germany), one of the family-owned companies forming the backbone of the German economy. "There is no external shareholder seeking only short-term profit. As a family, you think differently—you think long-term. And that defines a company, its culture and its employees. And not to forget, we have a high equity ratio and are not in debt—a huge plus in difficult times like these."

Otto Männer founded the company in 1965. Its start in manufacturing precision molds for audio and video soon pulled it into the international market. Then came the era of CDs and DVDs. Experiencing steady growth, männer began to focus on the medical device market and today specializes in serving molders in the medical and pharmaceutical, packaging, and personal- and healthcare markets. Production is now done at sites in Germany, Switzerland, and the U.S.

The moldmaker is now in its second generation with the eldest of the founder's three sons, Hans-Peter, heading the team. He recalls how the family literally lived their molding business: "Office, production, and our living space—everything was under one roof in the beginning." He assumed leadership in 2002. Family patriarch Otto and his wife Christel remain on the board of directors, and all three sons serve as shareholders.

President and CEO Hans-Peter Männer assumed leadership of the family firm in 2002.

Think locally, act globally

"The founder usually starts out where he is at home," Männer says. "In our case it happened to be Bahlingen, which turned out to be a big advantage for us." More than 10% of männer's nearly 400 employees are apprentices. He says one goal is to excite young professionals for the business. "This would be much more difficult in an area where large industrial enterprises, insurance companies, or banks are dominant." Männer adds that his father realized early that qualified people are paramount to the success of a company.

Even though predictions for 2009 are everything but bright, Hans-Peter Männer allows a certain amount of optimism. Incoming orders in 2008 were in fact higher than the year before. "During normal times I would say that we are full," Männer says. "We'll be working at full capacity until about September. It was a good decision to focus on a niche market like the medical device industry—but

we'll have to wait and see. It's likely that competitors who have been focusing more on the automotive industry are going to turn to medical." —
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