



BINDING RELATIONSHIPS

The printing industry has taken some hard knocks over the past few decades, thanks to the rise of digital technology. Peleman Industries has gone to great lengths in order to adapt to these changing conditions and Esmeralda Peleman is confident her family's business will continue to be a leader in the market.

ESMERALDA PELEMAN / CO-CHAIRWOMAN AND CEO Peleman Industries

When the Scheldt river flooded, in 1976, it completely destroyed the Peleman family business facilities and residence, in Puurs, Belgium. At the time, it was not certain whether the company could continue.

With the family divided as to which path to follow, interested parties were asked to write down their bids for the business in order to carry it forward.

The most convincing and forward-looking proposal came from Guido Peleman and this year marks the 40th anniversary of the 'New' Peleman company which his daughter, Esmeralda, has been involved with for over 20 years and is the current co-chairwoman and CEO

"My father convinced me to join the company," says Esmeralda, "I had studied law and wanted to pursue that, but my father said it would take me years to decide whether I liked that career, whereas I would know whether the company was right for me very quickly. Thanks to my father, I absolutely made the right choice and I do not regret it for one second."

Changes

Esmeralda has worked in various positions throughout the company and this, alongside growing up surrounded by the business, ensures she has seen, first-hand, the seismic changes taking place in the industry over the years.

Peleman relaunched producing binding products, which took off at pace and, since 1979, they have been specialising in the design, manufacture and worldwide distribution of solutions for printed presentations, photos and lay-flat paper technology.

During the 1980s, the CeBit trade show became the primary outlet to showcase and sell their office equipment, as Esmeralda explained.

"In those days, before the trade show became focused on IT equipment, over 40 companies were offering similar kinds of binders to us. Today, there are probably just three remaining, which gives you some idea of how hard we have worked to stay relevant."

However, as much of a challenge as the rise of technology posed to their business, Peleman owes one of the founders of that indus-

try a great deal, as Esmeralda pointed out.

"A big year for us came in 2006 when Apple's Steve Jobs decided to use our covers to create his photo books. This opened doors to a new market for us and, rather than just office supplies, we were now entering the digital photo and printing industry. It is partially thanks to him that, today, we have such solid relationships with the likes of Canon, Epson, Kodak, Fuji and others."

This was a defining moment for Peleman. Before, they had always been the designer and producer, determining and developing what their clients should need. Suddenly, it was the consumer who was making the decisions and it has remained that way to this day, with customers continuing to become much more demanding and selective. These new challenges were made even harder when the 2010 recession hit.

"We had some very tough periods during that time," admits Esmeralda, "everybody was talking about cost-cutting and the continued rise of digitalisation, and it posed a challenge to all companies in our business. Digitalisation has certainly had a huge impact on our market, but it is not the world. You need paper and printing; it is always going to be a combination of both."

Although automation is always high on Esmeralda's agenda, she also recognises the need for properly skilled workers in the industry and admits that finding these individuals can be a challenge.

"When you do find quality staff, it is imperative you put them in a good position, not just for the company but also for themselves. I believe that a happy and satisfied workforce is better for everyone. Having a competent employee, who feels a lack of motivation, is no good to anyone. If you have somebody valuable, make the most of them so they can

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grow with the company."

Having been around for so long, Peleman has needed to be an innovative company and is always trying to stay ahead of the game, whether in processes, products, or their approach to the markets. They were also early movers in the green energy market and currently have two wind turbines with an industrial battery and are in the process of looking into solar panels to help run the factory.

But Esmeralda believes it is also about maintaining strong bonds with customers.

"We offer the complete solution when it comes to our customers' needs. Whereas some companies offer covers, or laminators, binding machines etc., you can brand your whole company through us and have everything personalised with your corporate identity. We never say no – we can always deliver."

Partnerships

This same working relationship is also true with their suppliers, where Peleman have continued to partner and grow with many of the same operators. Esmeralda admits that they have been very lucky over the years but puts it down to an understanding of each other's needs.

"A fair partnership is integral to the relationship. Making money is the name of the game, but both parties need to thrive for this to work. Whenever we start a new project, we always include our suppliers, so they can contribute and that way, together, we can maximise both our skills. It is only because of them that we are able to always come through for the customer."

Even with more than 35 key suppliers, Esmeralda insists Peleman always has back-ups at the ready. "We always have two suppliers for items, as we cannot afford to be delayed and, if a company cannot deliver to us, we need that go-to source. We are very open about this and all our suppliers are aware of our necessity for this risk management policy."

With all the bases covered and an ability to quickly adapt to the market, Peleman Industries look to have built themselves a stable and secure base in the market. The only floods likely to be affecting this company, for the foreseeable future, are the foreseeable future, are the waves of orders they will continue to receive. 🌊