

# WISE WORDS

YANNIS DELIDIMOS / CEO Intertrade Hellas



Yannis Delidimos, the founder and chief executive officer of Intertrade Hellas, could talk the hind legs off a donkey, which is no bad thing considering how much wisdom he's acquired over the course of his ongoing – and very successful – business career. Any budding entrepreneurs lucky enough to have a chat with the charismatic Greek better bring a pen and notepad because his words are golden, literally.

**I**ntertrade Hellas, the leading private label tissue producer in Greece, has weathered some storms, notably the financial crisis of 2009-11 that brought the Greek economy to its knees. Yannis Delidimos founded the company in 1994 and on top of selling quality paper products bearing its own brand name SERVIN, Intertrade Hellas consolidated its strong presence in the paper converting industry with the purchase of the SOFTEX brand in 2016. There's also the small matter of inaugurating a new factory in Athens' northern suburb of Metamorphosi, decked out with state-of-the-art technology, on the agenda. It's fair to say that the company's strategy is anything but paper-thin.

"The company was initially founded as a brokerage agent between paper mills and converters, selling raw materials from the former to the latter," Yannis says, bursting with energy. "In 2005, I helped transform the company into a converting factory and we've been producing quality products ourselves for the last 15 years."

## Knowing the market

Yannis explains that the success of his business is largely down to detailed planning, being flexible, and executing a carefully considered business model: "One of the things we did right at the beginning was to read the market before planning our business strategy – then we executed it rigorously. In 2005 we realised there was a significant gap in the Greek market, specifically in the private label market, which was totally unrepresented as the country was importing a significant amount of paper from Italy. The main reason for this gap was that Greek paper mills didn't have the capacity or organisational structure to satisfy the needs of the big supermarkets. This is where we came in, we recognised the grey area and acted on it."

Intertrade Hellas' founder and CEO says he can't stress the importance of market research. Largely thanks to acquired knowledge and insight, in just over a decade the company managed to generate €80 million in turnover. It now exports paper products to 22 countries around

the world and supplies big names like Lidl and major Greek supermarkets. "All of this took place during a difficult time for the country, so we knew we were doing something right," adds Yannis.

"You must be ready to lose before you start to make money. During the first few years we were prepared to part with a significant amount of money because that's how the industry works," he says. "More importantly, you must learn how to lose money because there are different ways to lose money. There's a smart way to lose money and a stupid way to lose money. We expanded our strategy and we adjusted our strategy, and that's why we're now in a very strong strategic position in the tissue industry, especially in Southeast Europe."

## Differentiation creates value

After starting out as a private label company, Intertrade Hellas purchased SOFTEX three years ago, which at the time was a leading paper brand in Greece with a history stretching back to 1930. This opened up the branded market and enabled the company to introduce products into hotels, restaurants, and the catering markets as a whole. Yannis is preparing to expand the company's range of products in the near future and increase production capacity.

"Recently we acquired a sizeable piece of land outside of Athens and we're planning to move all three factories to this premises, so it's a huge task that will significantly increase our operational capacities in the next couple of years."

Once again, Yannis emphasises the importance of scrutinising the market and its participants to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of everyone and everything involved: "One thing in particular that differentiates us from our competitors is that we think before we act. We always try to understand what the worst-case scenario could be, so if tragedy strikes →





**Yannis is expanding Intertrade's range of products and increasing production capacity**

*“ Essel Paper and Intertrade Hellas enjoy a successful partnership in tissue paper supply. Cooperation between our companies continues to develop and we look forward to strengthening this relationship in the future ”*

Owner and President of Essel Paper  
Abdurrahman Esen

we are prepared for it. We also invest heavily in technology and fixed assets. I've followed Porter's Five Forces for a long time and I know that differentiation creates value. This is why we purchased the SOFTEX brand, because after a point, when you've exhausted all the economies of scale you can achieve, differentiation is what can drive you forward and give you extra value.”

Yannis almost wells up with emotion when he mentions his suppliers – his company has built several lasting business relationships over the years through thick and thin. He says Intertrade Hellas is lucky to have suppliers who provide quality products on time and on spec. “It's like cooking,” he adds. “You can have the best chef in the world but if you don't have the ingredients the outcome won't be tasty. We evaluate our clients regularly and every week we test the raw materials that we receive to ensure that they satisfy all the specs we have provided. I don't think that you should exhaust your supplier regarding pricing but it's important to demand competitive pricing. Rockefeller once

said, 'I didn't sell high, I didn't buy low, but I'm still rich.' This means you need to be fair with the market and not try to squeeze every penny out of it. We work hard to maintain a fair relationship with our suppliers because sometimes they need our assistance and sometimes we need their assistance. It's a two-way thing.”

**Lasting relationships**

Greece's infamous crisis of 2009-11 isn't the only obstacle Yannis has overcome. In 2015, capital controls were introduced in the coun-

*“ All of this took place during a difficult time for the country, so we knew we were doing something right ”*

try when the government reached the end of its bailout extension period without having agreed a further extension with its creditors. As a result, all Greek banks closed for almost three weeks to avoid a complete collapse of the country's banking system. “During this time we really needed our suppliers' help,” Yannis explains. “And believe me, if we had not been generous ourselves to them during the years before capital controls, our suppliers would have treated us differently. We were restricted from transferring any funds from Greece to the outside world but our suppliers came in and provided us with raw materials – they took our word that we would pay them. This trust is something that has been built over a long time.”

Yannis and his company may have emerged unscathed from tough times but he's made his own luck in the paper converting game through hard work, rigorous market analysis, and smart moves. However, the enthusiastic Greek signs off with what could be his most valuable slice of wisdom: “If you really love and care about what you do, you'll never work a day in your life.”



[www.essel.com.tr](http://www.essel.com.tr)



**PERFECTION YOU NEED!**



ZONGULDAK, TURKEY

OSMANIYE, TURKEY