



Anouk Sannemann, CEO of Wisa.

65 years of Wisa

CORPORATE GOAL: SATISFACTION

The name Wisa has stood for promotional balloons from the Netherlands for 65 years, today the family business is equally famous for its high-quality paper items. Reliability, entrepreneurial spirit and customer loyalty have turned Wisa into one of the leading suppliers of its kind on the promotional products market.

Anyone, who visits the company in Enschede, The Netherlands, which lies right next to the German border, notices immediately that Wisa is a family business: On the right is the administration building, offices and balloon printing shop, on the left the paper production and right in the middle the house of Willy Sannemann jun., the

father of the current CEO, Anouk Sannemann. "We are still 100% family-owned today, independent from external investors," explained Anouk Sannemann proudly. "My father and I grew up with balloons and my children are growing up in between balloons too."

What started off as a one-man business is today a company with 23 permanent employees and around 30 homeworkers: Anouk Sannemann's grandfather, Willy Sannemann sen., whose initials are easily recognisable in the company's name, began imprinting balloons in 1953 in the front room of his parents' house in Enschede: These were blown up using a Hoover, sealed with a peg and then moved over a printing plate. Later a bicycle rim was used instead of the

pegs and a rubber roller instead of the printing plate. With the help of the neighbours the production was initially increased up to 500 pieces a day, before more machines and employees brought further growth. In 1976, Willy Sannemann jun. took over the company and changed it over to its present legal form, Wisa Enschede BV. In 1987, the old location in the residential area had become much too small – the house was bursting at the seams and the gardens of the neighbours were "occupied", lorries constantly blocked the drive, so the firm moved to the Euregio Industry Park in Enschede. Then, a few years later Wisa expanded its line-up to include paper items.

Anouk Sannemann joined the company at the age of 18 – that was 25 years ago: "Not only the company is celebrating a round birthday in 2018, I am too." In the year 2000, the grand-daughter of the founder became a member of the management, she has been a managing shareholder since 2015. Her father has since retired from the



operating business and today supports the company as a consultant and developer. "Wherever required, I contribute my decades of experience in the decision-making process. Furthermore, my hobby still remains tinkering around developing new machines," stated Willy Sannemann.

The sales market of the company has always been the promotional products market – the promotional products retail trade to be precise. "We also supply to users in the Netherlands – the roots for this lie in the company's history, this is simply how we grew here in this country. However, outside of the Netherlands we exclusively supply to promotional products resellers without exception," reported Anouk Sannemann.

Latex and paper

Today, balloons account for 60% of Wisa's turnover. Around 50 mil. balloons leave the printing shop in Enschede every year. Wisa permanently stocks up to six million pieces, sorted into 44 standard colours and three sizes; on top of this there are different special shapes and huge balloons with diameters of up to 6.5 m. Natural latex blanks made by European manufacturers are exclusively implemented. "For a while we sourced balloons from a partner factory in Malaysia, but in the meantime we exclusively rely on European quality," stated Anouk Sannemann.

The days of the improvised flexo printing are of course long gone by – screen printing has been the preferred method for imprinting balloons since the 1990s. 14 printing carousels are available in Enschede guaranteeing a minimum volume of 1 mil. pieces a week. For uni-coloured motifs machines that briefly blow up the balloons for the printing process are used. "Of course, it is unavoidable here that the odd balloon 'bursts'," explained Anouk Sannemann. "A further disadvantage of this technology is the fact that a certain offset occurs in the case of multi-coloured motifs." That is why in the meantime the company relies on modern high-quality precision printing machines, which pull the balloon onto a round plate before being imprinted. The printing result is accurate, razor-sharp and durable.

Around 40% of the turnover is achieved with the sales of paper items – from flags, bunting and sun visitors, to horns and waving hands, through to plates, cups and food flags. The items are imprinted in the nearby offset printing shop or – for rush orders – using digital printing methods. Wisa has been producing and packing its



paper items in its own production department at the company's premises since 2006. A small share of the paper products are still produced by homeworkers today, but the majority of the production occurs using a fully-automated process today. State-of-the-art machines enable the production of high volumes within the shortest space of time. For example, horns and paper flags are produced in a fully-automated process as well as food flags – an important, highly popular product for the POS and catering industry – and not only a best seller in the cheese-making nation, the Netherlands: "The burger trend has triggered off a huge demand for burger picks, we were even surprised by the intensity of the demand ourselves," said Anouk Sannemann with joy.

Coffee mugs are the latest product group that is produced in a fully-automated process: "Customers kept on asking us if we couldn't deliver to-go cups, so we finally invested in a production unit

that we put into operation in 2017," commented Anouk Sannemann. "The cardboard with the necessary PE coating is purchased in Finland and imprinted and put together in Enschede – not like the paper plates, which are printed first and then laminated and punched."

High standards

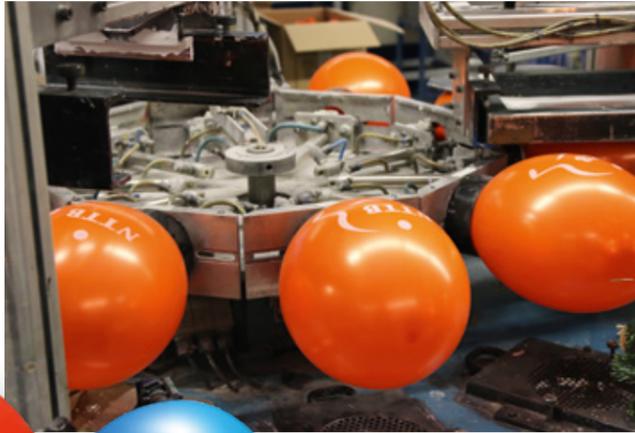
It goes without saying that all Wisa products that come into contact with food underlie strict hygiene regulations. Anouk Sannemann: "Hygiene is a highly-sensitive theme for our customers and an important USP over the competitors for the Far East. To mention just one example: A large Dutch supermarket chain, who had up until then always sourced their food flags from China, asked us for a quote at some point in time. We turned them down explaining that we would be too expensive, but at the same time pointed out the hygiene deficits of the packing procedures that are usually implemented for Chinese goods. This shocked the buyer so much that they withdrew the flags from the Far East from their line-up and from then on started ordering them from us. We have been producing around 8 mil. pieces a year for this customer ever since." ➔



The Wisa headquarters in Enschede today.



Company founder Willy Sannemann sen. in the printing shop in 1966.



14 printing carousels guarantee a minimum volume of 1 mil. pieces a week.



For accurate multi-colour motifs, the balloons are pulled onto a plate prior to being imprinted.



The high standards of Wisa's production are confirmed by independent auditing firms – the company is both ISO 9001 (quality management) and ISO 14001 (environmental management) certified. "Our production sites are not only checked every year in the scope of the ISO certifications, Intertek also carries out annual audits on behalf of McDonald's, whereby we always receive top marks," added Anouk Sannemann.

However, the biggest advantage Wisa has over the cheap suppliers from the Far East is its speed. Around 3,000 m² of storage space guarantee stable delivery capabilities even for large orders. "Most of the products we sell are project-related and are needed for a specific occasions

– i.e. for the coming Football World Cup," said Anouk Sannemann. "Even though the Netherlands didn't manage to qualify, we are still selling flags and bunting with the flags of the participating nations in large quantities." Our in-house production enables high speeds and the necessary flexibility for the forward transaction business in the B2B segment. "Punctuality is the be all and end all. Just this morning a customer rang, who needed his goods delivered by mid-day – which we made possible," commented Anouk Sannemann. When time is short, the family business bends over backwards: "Once when a Norwegian customer received a delivery of balloons without the balloon sticks, I jumped in my car and delivered the missing sticks to him personally, recalled Willy Sannemann.

A service approach that not only large-volume customers profit from, in times when the trend is increasingly going towards smaller order volumes on the B2B market. Anouk Sannemann: "Nobody would have believed a decade or two ago that small volumes would start playing such an important role again. Today, they shape the day-to-day business. The effort remains the same, nevertheless we still provide the same quality of service." This also includes the recently completely relaunched and restructured website, which offers a transparent overview of the products, prices and tiered prices in a log-in protected distributor section.

The strong orientation towards the requirements and needs of the customers leads to high customer loyalty. "We are well-known," summed up Anouk Sannemann. "Thanks to our comprehensive and loyal client base, we don't have to do any big-scale marketing anymore. We don't participate at any shows anymore either, because it takes up too much time and money – resources that we prefer to invest elsewhere. Our corporate goal is not: Growth at any price, but instead: Satisfaction. And we have actually been satisfied for 65 years."

A good conclusion to commemorate the anniversary that is officially taking place on March 1 – and a good foundation for many more years of Wisa. ■ TB

www.wisa.nl

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Coffee mugs have been produced in Enschede since 2017.