

Custom-Made, One-of-a-Kind

An Interview with Markus Döttling,
Managing Partner, Döttling GmbH

EDITORS' NOTE After graduating from high school, Markus Döttling earned a master's degree in metal processing and became a master locksmith. Soon afterward, he joined the family business, founded by his great-grandfather in 1919, and he assumed his current role in 2001.



Markus Döttling

COMPANY BRIEF Founded by Ernst Döttling and based in Sindelfingen, Germany, Döttling GmbH (www.doettling.com) is a global provider of meticulously restored antique safes, characterized by its state-of-the-art interiors and artful exteriors, as well as of modern high-security luxury safes.

Are you happy with Döttling's business despite economic challenges, and are you optimistic for future brand growth?

We are doing very well, we're growing very fast, and we don't have any problems or concerns in the world market. We focus on a niche market, quality-wise and price-wise.

How would you describe your product base, and are there new products lines?

All of our safes are custom-made, one-of-a-kind pieces. Our Legends safes are original antique safes that we restore. We have two new lines of modern safes: the Bel-Air looks like a travel trunk and is completely covered in leather, sailcloth, fur, or even bird feathers, and the Chameleon can be installed in or integrated into an interior such as a cabinet, for instance. Our sales are growing for this product line, accounting for nearly 50 percent of our turnaround.

What are your key global markets, and what new markets are in store for the brand?

The most important market for us is still North America – the U.S. and Canada, as well as Mexico. We're starting in Asia now, where we have a brand-new distribution company with showrooms in Beijing, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. And we're concentrating on South America, which is another new market for us.

When entering new markets, do you go through a distributor or do you remain independent?

We try to distribute directly, if possible, and I visit most of our clients personally and consult

with them, but everything is limited, including labor, so we decided to give away the Asia market, the South America market, and the India market. They will be distributed by somebody else.

How do you build awareness for your brand, and are you happy with the recognition you have achieved?

We've been working with a professional marketing agency in Germany for one year. They take care of our advertising and editorials. We've seen a large increase in turnaround since working with them.

Is there a role for technology in how you design and produce your product, which historically has been handcrafted?

What has changed is the number of employees we have, because we are growing very fast. We have doubled our manufacturing employees, for instance. But there are no new or different ways of manufacturing. We try to keep the historical techniques intact. We are very proud of being able to work that way.

How long does the production process take, and how closely throughout the process do you work with clients?

A customer has to wait 12 to 14 months from placement of the order until delivery, but this is due to our long waiting list, not total labor time. When I consult with a client for the first time, we agree on design and materials, and then we go from there. We keep in touch with the client during restoration. We send pictures at every stage about every two months, so clients are completely involved in the process.

Are you able to make almost anything that's requested?

We are able to make almost anything. We try to make every client's wish come true. Every product is one-of-a-kind, and that's a big advantage for us.

How are you a leader in customer service?

We keep in very close contact with our clients, which is very important. Some of our clients are purchasing more than one safe from us, so we're doing something right.

What do clients use your safes for?

We do at least 90 percent of all interiors for watch collectors. Our best working interior is the watch interior. We offer very small safes with six automatic watch movers, but we delivered a piece recently to Beijing that is seven feet high and has space for nearly 300 watches.

How do you differentiate your brand in this market?

There are half a dozen companies worldwide in this luxury safe business, and they all do standard high-security safes in nice shapes, with nice lacquering and with beautiful interiors, but nothing more or nothing very special. So I don't see any competition.

How important is it for you to spend time with clients?

The most important thing in our business is for me to meet with my clients personally.

What are your key priorities over the next two or three years for the brand?

Maintaining quality and improving upon it are absolutely the most important things. That's what we are working on every day – to be better and to get better. ●

The Döttling Legends Safe No. 142