

FORUM

The Stieglmeyer-Group's company magazine



"We are hoping to resume operations in September"

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When the corona crisis began, we at Stieglmeyer were busy with the final preparations for the geriatric care fair *Altenpflege* in Hanover. Now all the fairs have long since been cancelled until August, and we miss the personal meetings and the many good discussions with our visitors. This situation is even harder on the many people who organise and set up trade fairs on a professional basis. We feel particularly close to our German booth construction partner *optimal Messebau*. Fortunately, our associates in Menden have many plans and ideas to survive the crisis unscathed. We talked about this with Managing Director Stefan Gemünd and Project Manager Miguel Sanchez.

Our partner optimal Messebau masters the crisis with good concepts

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What is the current situation for optimal Messebau?

Stefan Gemünd: At the beginning we did not take the crisis so seriously and thought the fairs will only be postponed, not cancelled. But the "cancelled" followed very quickly and we were faced with the decision of whether to close our business. But the company *optimal Messebau* has been around for 34 years now and we were not prepared to simply give up our life's work. So we started to develop strategies to survive. First of all, we had to secure our financing – and with the help of our banks we succeeded in doing so. It paid off that we always kept our commitments for years. The crisis has shown how important intangible assets such as reliability and trust are. We will definitely make it into next year.

What are you working on at the moment?

Stefan Gemünd: We are now using the time to cultivate customer relations, prepare for upcoming trade fairs and modernise our operational structures. We are currently working on further developing our online and social media presence. We are also supported by the regional press – the Westfalenpost newspaper currently reports regularly about us.

Many shops or restaurants, which are now cautiously reopening, require constructional safety measures. Do you have anything like this on offer?

Stefan Gemünd: Yes, we offer installations that increase safety in hospitals or stores – e.g. dividing panels under which you can pass something through. We focus on solutions that are as simple as possible, that are free-standing and do not need to be permanently fixed. These are systems made of wood or aluminium, combined with single-pane safety glass or laminated glass, so that there is no risk of cuts if a pane of glass breaks. We maintain high safety standards even during the crisis. Plexiglas is currently not available on the market, it is sold out until July.

Would store construction also be a long-term alternative for your company?

Stefan Gemünd: We already have some experience in this field, for example, we have set up a perfumery and designed showrooms for companies. We are happy to talk to anyone who has an enquiry, but our main focus is not on store construction – the companies that have already been doing this full-time are still here. But there are other good ideas: for example, renting our LED technology if a company wants to show films of its showrooms in high quality, or 3D visualisations for our customers.

Miguel Sanchez: We also rent out spacers and stands for posters. This is useful for shopping centres or petrol stations that want to inform their customers about the safety rules and ensure the mandatory distance in front of the checkout.

What do you think will happen to the trade fairs in the coming months?

Stefan Gemünd: We hope to resume our activities in September. AUMA, the German association representing the interests of trade fairs, is in constant contact with the government. If there are to be trade fairs again after the end of the ban on major events as of August 31, all those involved need to have a decision by mid-June to prepare themselves. There is a lot of talk about soccer games, but we urge not to forget the booth builders, trade fair companies and exhibitors! Germany is the No. 1 trade fair country. The industry thrives on presenting its goods. Trade fairs cannot be replaced by virtual rooms, people want to touch the products and have face-to-face conversations.

Do you believe that trade fairs will be safe again in the foreseeable future?

Stefan Gemünd: There can be good safety concepts for trade fairs, for example by widening aisles and limiting the number of visitors. What is the difference between a furniture store that is allowed to reopen and an expo hall? There is none. Maybe some exhibitors are unsure at first and want to keep costs low – in which case we can offer reasonably priced smaller booths from a very attractive modular lightweight construction system.

Miguel Sanchez: In addition to safety, a second aspect is crucial: Can visitors travel internationally again? Only if this is allowed will major international trade fairs make sense again this year. Otherwise I see better chances for trade fairs with a domestic target group.

We hope that optimal and Stieglmeyer will soon be able to welcome trade fair visitors again. Many thanks for the interview!