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Feel good shoes Made in Germany – Youthful trend in high quality

Press release by: Initiative Ja-zu-Deutschland (Initiative Yes-to-Germany)

Producing shoes in Germany seems to be a particularly difficult enterprise, as especially high volume products are subject to low-cost competition by foreign manufacturers. But those who position themselves with ingenuity and deliberate high-quality craftsmanship have excellent possibilities as the example of Birki's shows. We talked to Stefan Simon, Brand Manager of Birki Schuh GmbH, about the marketplace, the self-image and worldwide trends:

Ja-zu-Deutschland: Mr. Simon, the company Birki's can be regarded as the "young line" of the classic Birkenstock shoes.

Stefan Simon: Yes, that's right. Birki Schuh GmbH has been independent since 1993. Since then we have launched more and more self-contained sandal and clog collections for kids and adults. They have been well received especially in the international marketplace.

Ja-zu-Deutschland: So, your lines target a different clientele than Birkenstock. A rejuvenation?

Stefan Simon: Both Birkenstock and Birki's understand themselves as "feel-good brands". Feeling good is at the centre of our attention. But we wanted to offer this feel-good experience, we also refer to it as "walking almost like barefoot", to a new target group. With fresh new designs, new forms, alternative materials. Especially children and youngsters gladly accept this enhancement.

Ja-zu-Deutschland: You talked about particularly good experiences abroad. Can you give us some examples?

Stefan Simon: In the U.S., where Birki's has been independent since 2006, our products became trend in a very short period of time. For surfers, e.g., our Birki's variety with special water-repellent ALPRO®-foam footbed has become an absolute "must-have". In France, Italy and England things are also working out very well. And we are also satisfied with developments here in Germany.



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Ja-zu-Deutschland: Your products are 100% made in Germany. Is it going to stay this way?

Stefan Simon: Yes, definitely. There are a lot of reasons: First of all, especially export markets are sensitised to "Made in Germany" as a token of high quality. For the most part consumers in the U.S. appreciate German craftsmanship. But there are also other reasons to hold on to our production location and our staff.

Ja-zu-Deutschland: For example?

Stefan Simon: We call it "short distance production". In a distribution system with a self-imposed mandate to supply each of our sales locations as fast and as individually as possible, we must be able to react in due course and control our production. Our warehousing is perfectly adjusted to the market, a lot of product is manufactured "on demand". This is possible only because our production processes are carefully coordinated and perfectly interlock without long communication and forwarding channels. Moreover, we take advantage of the competitive developmental edge of our staff.

Ja-zu-Deutschland: Developmental edge of staff?

Stefan Simon: Our employees are the actual experts. Nobody knows better what is important in production and planning. Therefore, our staff is involved in planning processes. We ask their opinion and often follow their advice. By using this "insider knowledge" we can not only delete existing problems, we can prevent them from happening in the first place. This has become our non-negligible competitive edge.

Ja-zu-Deutschland: Many no-name vendors try to copy your design and finish characteristics. Is that a problem for you?

Stefan Simon: Let's put it this way: The more danger, the more honour. But of course we cannot think about product piracy and counterfeiting as casually as that, because poor quality that looks like Birki's on the outside, destroys customer confidence. Our lawyers try their best to fight the most audacious counterfeiters from the Asian region tooth and nail. Unfortunately, it's not that easy, especially since our local jurisdiction grants us hardly any legal leverage with respect to the most impudent attacks from Asia. All in all, our distribution system guarantees our own customers' superior safety.



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Ja-zu-Deutschland: What does that mean?

Stefan Simon: That we put a lot of emphasis on the respectability of our distribution partners. Specialty dealerships are the best protection from plagiarism – for our customers and, of course, for ourselves.

Ja-zu-Deutschland: Last but not least, do you have a wish for the production location Germany?

Stefan Simon: More self-confidence maybe. It truly is the self-confident exposition of “Made in Germany” that’s positively perceived and appreciated in foreign countries.

Ja-zu-Deutschland: Mr. Simon, many thanks for the discussion and we wish Birki’s continued success.

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The initiative Ja-zu-Deutschland.de (Yes-to-Germany-de) was founded by graduate engineer Sascha Rabe of Kamen in the spring of 2004. Its goal was not only to present products made in Germany but also the companies behind these products. Obviously the Kamen-resident entered a void with this project: at times when more and more productions and jobs are moved abroad and consumers no longer know how to counteract this trend, a central information point, a platform for companies producing in Germany, was needed. As early as 2004, then prime minister of the state of Northrhine Westfalia, Peer Steinbrück, was so convinced by this idea that he supported the young initiative with a welcome note. A support shared by his successor Dr. J. Rüttgers.

Functional sandals and clogs in modern design – that’s what the name Birki’s has been standing for since 1993. As licensee of Birkenstock Orthopädie GmbH & Co. KG, Birki Schuh GmbH can look back on more than 230 years of experience in shoe manufacturing. The anatomic footbeds of the Birki styles perfectly adjust to the foot and support the natural step formation even during extended periods of walking and standing. Special production methods allow for the production of very light and extremely durable sandals and clogs. Due to the combination of innovative polymers with natural materials Birki’s can be employed in a variety of different areas, like sauna, pool, spa, hotel, kitchen, hospital, garden, holiday, leisure, etc. The terms “anatomically moulded” and “highly developed” best summarise all Birki’s collections to date.

Birki's – Imagination knows no bounds.