

Thank you very much for talking to us, Mr. Rösler. We wish you and the Alpina brand continuing success and are grateful for the opportunity to work with you.

Alpina - Expanding into color

A new coat of paint for a well-known brand: Alpina – heretofore known in the interior paint market as the white giant for wall covering – is suddenly showing its colors now and moving into the lifestyle segment. In an interview, Alpina executive Martin Rösler talks about what led up to this move and what the methods employed by Hamburg-based agency Sturm und Drang had to do with it.

Mr. Rösler, we sat down together two years ago to think about how Alpina could expand beyond the white segment into the world of vivid colors. What all has happened since then? Were the results from the journey we went on together useful?

Absolutely, and a lot has happened! Working with Sturm und Drang helped us better understand and rethink consumers' color needs and expectations in their homes. And we learned a lot about our own brand how it is perceived.

What was the starting point in this process?

Alpina enjoyed over ninety percent brand recognition in the paint market thanks to our flagship product Alpinaweiss, which in the minds of our customers was synonymous with high-performing, highly pure white dispersion paint. It was a positive association, but we were not known at all for color and design expertise.

From clean white expert to lifestyle color consultant

So what was the main challenge in the journey to color?

It was taking our core values and translating them into a new offering with new positioning in line with the needs of our customers. Starting out with the mono-product brand Alpinaweiss, we had to develop a cohesive overarching brand strategy for moving into the color segment. Color has entirely different emotional associations in the home than clean white, such as creativity, excited anticipation, and design.

And that was when you approached us at Sturm und Drang...

Exactly. The situation was fairly complex in terms of objectives. So we started out by defining what the process

would be together. The intriguing ethnographic approach employed by the Sturm und Drang strategists yielded valuable insights into our customers' lives and how they see us, and the ingenious propositions: "Alpina lets you paint over the previous tenant" and "When you buy Alpina you get dependability, strength and color". That's a pretty unique triad. Existing values like covering effectiveness formed an ideal basis for infusing the brand with aesthetic expertise without abandoning the core brand values. In this process we gained the key insight that this is in fact doable.

So how did you go about integrating color expertise into marketing?

We re-positioned the brand by developing a new slogan to co-exist in parallel with our established one of "A little work. A big impact." This new slogan is: "ALPINA – The Color Experts". We wanted to build on the well-known paint performance of Alpina products, adding the dimension of consulting expertise in design and colors. It was clear that recharging the brand core this way would open up an entirely



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new group alongside the classic male do-it-yourself consumer segment: women with design affinity.

How did you go about making this repositioning an emotionally connecting experience for consumers?

To allow consumers to experience the repositioning we worked with the agency to analyze the complete product range and the concept behind it in order to derive what adjustments needed to be made.

The mass market for color paints in DIY stores has been occupied by competitor product lines that are barely distinguishable in terms of real added value, despite different choices of color shades. Thus the opportunity we saw lay in redefining aesthetics on the color paint shelves of hardware stores so as to transport a message of design expertise and occupy that space.

A brand narrative that makes every color come alive

How did you manage that?

We developed the Alpina “Fine Colors” concept jointly with Sturm und Drang in co-creative workshops. It is the first ‘mass-premium’ concept in the segment, communicating design and style expertise that appeals to lifestyle-oriented female buyers. This is a timeless paint collection of elegant matt shades based on select pigments with a number of new features, like an upscale-looking metal container in combination with a unique brand narrative. Every paint in the collection is a color personality with names like “ivory rebel” that resonate with associations. The color guide for the collection describes these color characters and shows their styling effect on a room, making the colors come alive.

What kept you moving forward with this bold and ambitious plan?

It was the collaboration with the agency. We were able to leverage the Sturm und Drang research findings throughout the entire process, keeping us on the right track. The ‘storylistening’ we did with our customers and the precision analysis of best-in-class examples we did were essential for developing relevant storytelling capable of emotionally charging the brand. Color today is about more than just covering a wall. It is a mode of self-expression and a means for defining one’s individuality.

What was the initial retail response to introduction of the new products?

We went for strictly premium positioning at the point of sale, with a stylish color portfolio for product presentation, an aesthetically designed 100-page color guide and superior true-sample color cards for checking and inspiration

at home. All of this was radically new in the segment, and there was a lot skepticism among the stores at first. Sure, they were interested in selling to a new segment group of design-oriented women, but there was major doubt concerning the pricing (40% above the regular market) and how the packaging would be received, i.e. the metal container itself in combination with the unusual product names.

Colors for personality: Storytelling for your own four walls

And what was the response among customers?

They overwhelmingly loved it, even in the first of the pilot markets. Retailers got the dual benefit of expanding added value while increasing sales by uncovering a new target group. The pilot figures were confirmed when the product line launched in 1,200 DIY stores. For the first time in our company history, Alpina was listed in the color dispersion category in all DIY store groups.

Sounds like a complete success. What has been happening with the product line since then?

We’ve had success on a number of levels. First of all, we opened up an all-new female segment of women with design affinity, among whom we established a well-founded, credible image for Alpina as a color expert through home living and lifestyle bloggers and social media posts.

The concept was enthusiastically received, and in some stores the paints were selling out. Today Alpina Fine Colors is the strongest brand on the color shelves by a wide margin,



and we’ve gotten very good press, including in the culture section of the newspaper Die Zeit and on the front page of the Hamburger Abendblatt. The success we’ve had is also evident in the amount of how much copycatting is going on, with our own brands moving in that direction and competitors launching me-too products. Yet we are the leader of the pack in this new mass-market segment, as within two years we have increased our market share from thirteen to thirty-six percent in the color dispersion category. That means we are the clear market leader.

Is this new product line reflecting on the overall image of the Alpina brand?

Yes it is. We have transformed ourselves from a functional, hygienic brand into a lifestyle brand. With our sudden but credible move into color expertise we have become relevant in home living and lifestyle in Germany. We have knocked our competitor Brillux out of first place, which until now had been dominant with the licensed brand “Schöner Wohnen” (‘more beautiful living’). And our advice content on social media is enthusiastically shared by the female target segment.

Has the success of this project changed the way you work at Alpina?

It certainly has, as we used to take a more technical approach to product development. Now innovation work is based on valuable consumer insights. After all, it is always about relevance for consumers and adding real value. The ideas, insights and strategies derivable from market research have become a crucially important tool for us. Now we systematically draw on detailed market research to optimize the en-



Successful image pivot from functional brand to the lifestyle product

tire process from conceptualization to packaging and POS presentation. That means every market launch rests on a strong strategic foundation, so when we approach retailers they know success is ensured. The ‘flop’ is a thing of the past.

In what ways has the communications strategy changed?

At the communication touch points, we now go to where the consumers are. For example, for our children’s room concept “Farbenfreunde” (‘Color Friends’) we are working with midwives and pediatricians, placing consultation brochures in their waiting room on color psychology in children’s room interiors. For the Fine Colors concept we are working with relevant social media multipliers for targeted image-building among the female market segment via multiple channels on Facebook, blogs and Instagram, generating a high level of attention. Broad-reach media like TV and print are out. They are no longer a focus in our media mix.