### INTERVIEWING THE INDUSTRY WAYNE BENNETT: MKN

by George Panks May 2020



The impact of COVID-19 has been felt by organisations large and small across the globe. There have been examples of great leadership amongst the commercial world – organisations have had to dig deep and transform working practices overnight in order to survive and thrive during the coronavirus crisis – and its aftermath.

One organisation, MKN, which is well known in the world of catering equipment, has been in business for seventy-five years. Situated on the old border that used to divide East and West Germany, this is an organisation that rose from the ashes of the second world war, and has seen economic downturns and the onset of the technological revolution; but as Wayne Bennett, the company's UK head of sales says, a global pandemic is a new scenario!

Adapting and overcoming the challenges is going to be important for all companies as we move out of lockdown. In this interview Wayne gives an insight into how this German manufacturer is approaching a changed world!

# *GP: Can you give me a brief history of MKN, the family business?*

WB: Technically speaking, MKN stands for Maschinenfabrik Kurt Neubauer GmbH & Co. KG, named after the founder who established the business in Germany in 1946. Figuratively speaking though, MKN stands for design, quality, precision technology and an abiding passion for the range of premium cooking equipment the company has been producing since Kurt Neubauer and his fledgling team turned their attention away from manufacturing machines for local farmers towards the commercial cooking sector.

MKN is the German specialist in premium thermal professional cooking technology! Customers from all over the world value the practicality of these innovative appliances. Every MKN product in catering, hotels, gastronomy and community catering and on luxury liners fulfils the highest demands!

In their permanent pursuit of the highest quality standards of innovations, multifunctional solutions and perfectly designed products, MKN specialists always focus on the whole kitchen process and the perfect interaction of all components involved. Competence, know-how and passion impel them to find individual solutions producing results which inspire and impress.

MKN values long-term business partnerships and attaches great importance to relationships characterised by trust, fairness and reliability. The sound organisational structure of a medium-sized company facilitates sustainable thinking with innovative capacity, respect for natural resources and closeness to the relevant market.

Large investments in new manufacturing technology, machinery and buildings combined with continuous staff training have transformed MKN from a factory into a state-of-the-art industrial company over recent years. The focus on export expansion has been a considerable driving force behind this development. Meanwhile, famous addresses around the world can be found among MKN's international top projects: Steigenberger, Hyatt, Hilton and Ritz Carlton as well as airports such as London Heathrow and Frankfurt; top restaurants, for example, at the Sydney Opera House or in the Burj Khalifa, Dubai and a large number of cruise ships, are all to be found among MKN's impressive references.

Numerous international industry awards demonstrate the innovation and top performance of MKN products. The company itself has also received many awards. For example, the Lower Saxony Foreign Trade Award and the Major Prize for Medium-Sized Business awarded by the Oskar Patzelt Foundation.

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*GP: What is your personal background, and how did you become involved at MKN? What is it about these products that inspired you to join?* 

WB: My career spans over twenty years in the catering equipment design, supply and installation industry. I started as a CAD designer working through to a design consultant for a leading design consultancy practice over an 8-year period.

Due to a relocation to another part of the country for personal reasons I then took an opportunity to diversify my skill-set, furthered my career within the industry, and went to work for a leading catering equipment distributor. I then had a period where I worked for a competitor of MKN for a short time until the opportunity came to join MKN, where I have now been for eight years.

During the time at both previous organisations, I had been involved and worked with MKN on a number of projects; the clients were very happy with the product quality, support and reliability and we are still in contact with them today and they continue to be customers as MKN believes in long-term relationship support.

Prior to joining I was fortunate to have the opportunity to visit MKN's HQ as a customer, and because I was so impressed, that really set the foundation for me to want to join and work with them when the time came.

In fact, it is funny how things work out, as I provided a job reference and encouraged my predecessor (who has recently retired) to join them, and he served MKN for 12 years, so I always had a close affiliation with the brand.

Wayne Bennett of MKN, pictured at the Hotel, Restaurant and Catering Show in March 2020 at the ExCel Centre, now the UK's first Nightingale field hospital.

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> *GP: Our readers are interested in MKN's story. How do you feel that COVID-19 has impacted on traditional trading markets?*

> WB: The negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the economy is becoming increasingly obvious and challenging across the globe. There are now only a few areas worldwide that have not been affected by this crisis. The hospitality industry globally is in an unprecedentedly extreme situation.

> The challenges are growing day by day but we as a company have been able to steer through this while following government regulations.

We continue to manufacture and operate and our independent flexible approach will enable us to assist and meet our clients' requirements.



GP: The factory is located on the East/West German border, and must have experienced some major challenges over the years. Has MKN ever experienced anything quite like COVID-19 before?

WB: No, we have never had to face such a challenge as COVID-19. Yes, over 75 years we have seen different trends and shifts in the market, political and economic but this pandemic is something so different and brings its own challenges.

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*GP: The FlexiChef has obviously been a tremendous success story for MKN. What is the next generation that is on the horizon, and what are its innovative new features?* 

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WB: The next generation FlexiChef is not only on the horizon, we have already presented and launched it at the HRC exhibition successfully in London this year – the FlexiChef 2.0. With the new FlexiChef, MKN presents a new generation of this popular multifunctional appliance. It has been extensively optimised and is faster than ever in almost every respect. It optimises time, space, efficiency, quality, cost-effectiveness and motivation for chefs in professional kitchens.

> A notable highlight is that the FlexiChef remains the only cooking appliance equipped with a skillet pan having its own automatic cleaning system. Besides the regular cleaning cycle at the end of the day, Space Clean can perform automatic intermediate cleaning, which takes only two minutes. This feature is exemplary for important standard requirements in professional kitchens in the future.

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The new FlexiChef is not only more efficient and flexible than its predecessor, it is also extremely easy to install. The cutting edge touch screen operating system MagicPilot is so intuitive and dynamic that even untrained chefs don't have any problems using it. Together with various support functions and a higher degree of automation, it is part of the new MKN Guided Cooking concept for achieving culinary excellence in every professional kitchen.

SmartBoiling is a new, energy-saving water boiling process, accessed directly as a quick start function from the Home screen. Standard features such as internet compatibility and Connected Kitchen cater for networking appliances and optimal equipment management. In addition, installation as well as power and water supply lines have been considerably redesigned and simplified.

The FlexiChef 2.0 redefines the high performance of its predecessor as it strives to continue the success story of the past years into the future.

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*GP: This pandemic has shed serious light on the climate situation, with cities like Beijing and Los Angeles now more pollution-free.* 

You're renowned for your sustainability and awards – do you think this has given you market edge? And do you think this will stand MKN in good stead going forward, post-COVID-19? WB: We think so. Because, as your question suggests, MKN is known for its high quality, innovative equipment and reliability with a sustainable focus on the effective use of natural resources. For us, the subject of hygiene is a matter close to our hearts. We develop cooking appliances that meet the current requirements of the market. We have already received many awards for this.

MKN also has a broad product portfolio of products. So we have exactly the right products and the right solutions for new business areas that may arise in the coming years.

MKN is certified according to ISO 9001 and 14001, which shows the high standard of MKN products and their sustainability. MKN technology is developed and manufactured in a very responsible manner with regard to the environment and resources. About 35 engineers and more than 30 chefs as well as the MKN GreenTeam, consisting of national and international specialists, are involved in the process of research and development. Within this group, the development of new MKN products is always focused on efficiency and profitability for the customer. MKN uses 100% green electricity from hydropower and its technology reduces energy consumption, saves

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*GP: We know the climate and vegan food trends are going to be ever more important post-COVID-19.* 

Why is MKN technology going to be so crucial when it comes to non-contact cooking and food safety?

WB: MKN has expanded its world of cooking and in addition continually innovates with the new FlexiChef and the new SpaceCombi combi steamers as solutions for the current challenges in the professional kitchen.

Special times require special measures. One of them may be the offer of the out-of-home market and delivery service, so that the catering business does not have to close down completely. In this way, employees can be kept busy and supplies can be processed – and guests are happy not to have to give up their favourite dishes.

Ever smaller kitchens offer only limited space for preparing food and equipping with appliances. Consumers are also demanding product variety in order to cater for different eating habits and nutritional trends. Basic needs in the food and beverage service sector are becoming increasingly complex, and these challenges often have to be met by untrained or temporary staff.

MKN's new SpaceCombi combi steamers have been developed to meet exactly these requirements. They save space, are easy to operate and energy efficient, and simple to clean at the same time. Despite their width of only 55 cm they are fully featured professional combi steamers offering GN 1/1 capacity without compromising any of their many technical features. For example, the new MKN Guided Cooking concept boasts a higher degree of automation and technical intelligence. Intuitive operation, simple instructions and other support functions make these combi steamers your perfect assistants in the daily kitchen routine. They ensure constant process reliability even when personnel without any cooking experience work in your kitchen. That's quality you can rely on!

The new models make cleaning by hand a thing of the past. Thanks to the WaveClean automatic cleaning system your SpaceCombi combi steamers are sparkling clean using only one cartridge for detergent and rinse aid. And there's no need for any additional manual cleaning as the cooking chamber interior and the triple-glazed insulated door are automatically cleaned as well.

In general, hygiene is an important issue in the professional kitchen and a guarantee for food safety. In the stressful daily routine in the professional kitchen, it is particularly important that the equipment can be cleaned quickly and easily, in order to gain more time for food production and to be able to implement hygiene standards without compromise.

The extensive MKN product portfolio offers numerous features that enable quick cleaning.

In addition to WaveClean, the automatic cleaning of our combi steamers, our FlexiChef also has the cleaning function we call SpaceClean. SpaceClean is the first and only automatic cleaning system for crucibles. This gives the cook new freedom to concentrate on the essentials.

Even automatic intermediate cleaning is possible with SpaceClean, in just two minutes without the use of chemicals. Up to now, cleaning in kitchens has often been a time-consuming part of the daily routine and, what's more, it was not very motivating for the employees. SpaceClean cleans the crucible almost by itself, and thus helps to increase productivity and the joy of cooking in FlexiChef kitchens.

And our MKN MasterLine also scores points when it comes to cleaning. In our premium customised cooking suites, the individual appliances are welded under a seamless three-millimetre hygienic cover plate. This enables easy cleaning and sets the highest hygiene standards, for which we are awarded a hygiene certificate every year.



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*GP:* Controlling the security and safety of food is essential in every commercial catering operation, not least in the healthcare and education sectors. Describe MKN's approach to HACCP recording during the food journey.

WB: With the MKN cloud solution Connected Kitchen, our company is taking a new path in communication. With intelligent technology, devices can now be networked. MKN has a strong partner at its side, the German Telekom, which operates worldwide. MKN not only provides the web interface to really see and store the equipment 'live', but also the technology behind it. With an LTE gateway, the data is secure. Whether recipes are to be created or shared, or cleaning and hygiene are to be documented and recorded – the smart and digital solution Connected Kitchen makes this possible and thus ensures greater transparency and security in the kitchen.

## *GP: MKN appointed a medical professional at their factory to ensure staff are safe during this time. Tell us about the crisis-planning and the success of this during COVID-19.*

WB: MKN has always had the wellbeing of its employees at its heart prior to this pandemic and takes care of them. It puts its people first, as they are the backbone of the company. MKN took professional advice from its appointed doctor and implemented steps to ensure that social distancing measures within the workplace could be adhered to, and that important hygiene and behaviour rules and recommendations for the prevention of infections would be observed. For example, there are disinfectant dispensers for the employees throughout the plant in Wolfenbüttel. Only a few employees work in the office; many of them already use the home office option to avoid contact, even with colleagues.

Travel is prohibited; visitors are currently not allowed to be received at the main plant. Alternative possibilities, such as webinars and Zoom meetings are now widely used. INTERVIEWING THE INDUSTRY WAYNE BENNETT: MKN by George Panks May 2020

### GP: What is MKN doing to look after its staff while they're furloughed?

WB: In Germany they have a different solution which translates to a shortened working week, so employees remain engaged within the company. This is a very effective solution.

Within the UK team we are in regular weekly contact with the whole team keeping everyone updated on company matters, but this really is a personal call to check that they are OK, both personally and family-wise as this has really affected everyone's wellbeing. We have also set up a UK Whatsapp group within which we all share what we are doing with the downtime to keep positive, so we can all keep a check on each other. MKN, being a family-owned business, values its employees.

We have also suggested that everyone look at personal development and encouraged a number of online digital courses to keep the minds active, so that when they are able to return, they will be in an even stronger position to succeed.

### *GP: What would be your message to the client-base during this difficult period?*

WB: For more than 70 years, and still today, MKN has been the reliable and strong partner for premium cooking technology. This means that our customers can count on us fully even in these difficult times. None of us knows how long we will be

exposed to these special house demands, but be sure that we, as a reliable, traditional company, will stand by your side and master these tasks together.

Our ability and willingness to deliver is given without any restrictions and we take all possible precautions to ensure that this will remain so. Let us look confidently into the future together and work out innovative solutions for your future projects.

Wayne Bennett, UK Head of Sales, MKN www.mkn.com





### **AUTHOR BIO**

George Panks is Creative Director at MYA. Having been with the company since November 2011, he has been instrumental in its growth, particularly in design.

George's ability to look at any design brief and bring the most creative and innovative solutions to the table is second to none. He is also an exceptional young leader, with his expert project management skills being utilised in large installation projects in Oxford colleges, business and industry and retail catering establishments.

George comes from a creative family of writers, animators, painters and performers. Armed with a degree in graphic design from the prestigious Arts University Bournemouth and nearly a decade of industry experience, he has an unrivalled creative flair.

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