

IN POLE POSITION FOR THE FUTURE: FINAT helps young managers on to the front row of the grid



The world of labels and packaging is unquestionably a core feature of branding, product security, and consumer approbation; and achieving these three ‘peaks’ is a complex mixture of technologies and design thinking. It is therefore hardly surprising that the international label association, FINAT, has created a highly-relevant and focused resource: the FINAT Young Managers Club. The FINAT YMC is dedicated to bringing together the younger generation in the broad industry’s management teams to equip them with leading-edge thinking on key topics that will put them – and the companies they support – in pole position for future success. Headline subjects include the central requirement of enhancing the younger generation’s own people-management skills as well as in-house HR relationships, logistics, and steering innovation. Says YMC President Chris Jones – himself a young manager and Vice President and Business Development Manager for Alphasonics USA. ‘Our mission is to build a relationship between the different streams in the supply chain in a way that ensures a professional, highly-competent, and market-responsive future for this industry.’

This year’s fifth annual YMC Global Congress was centred in Bucharest in early September, and brought together a number of male and female participants from across the industry’s supply chain. The programme opened with a visit to the local headquarters of world-leading transport and logistics company DSV Solutions, which set a highly-relevant twenty-first-century business context for the formal meeting agenda.

Participants came together thereafter for relaxed drinks and dinner alongside the hotel’s spa, and next morning sat down to listen to Diana Voicu, specialist trainer, human resources consultant, and Senior Learning Architect for MMM Consulting, who has worked with a broad base of leading brands across the different specialties.

Personal engagement

Her primary topic was the subject of personal engagement with a company’s broad employee team. She delved in depth into the ways this can be achieved to the benefit in the business context of a manager’s relationship with the team. ‘What could be missing for ME to get more engagement?’, she challenged participants to ask themselves. Could it be the infrastructure – the materials and equipment – that need improving? --It takes time to find solutions, Voicu explained; and a good route to follow is to set up workshops, which help to ventilate shortcomings and to identify the necessary and appropriate solutions. Could it be, she asked, that a ‘best friend at work’ is missing – ie that you

lack established strong in-house relationships? In such cases, the answer would be to focus on team building through setting up informal meetings and creating opportunities to have fun with the team – and, of course, it's important to praise them – even for small achievements.



Going for goal

There are three easy steps for a young manager to take, Voicu summarised: share your vision (while painting the bigger picture); give your people the right role in the team; and discuss their continuing engagement. Then, she adjured the FINAT young managers to go for the BHAG – the Big Hairy Audacious Goal!

Participants were challenged to consider 'Of all the things you've done so far this year, what are you most proud of – and what would you do differently?' Mulling this over, and writing down the outcome, provided a valuable insight and future starting point for participants.

Strategic recruitment tactics

Next, colleagues EPSN Chief Growth Officer Jeroen Tijnk and Gabriela Marin, International Recruitment Business Partner, explored the physical recruitment process. 'Recruitment,' said Tijnk, 'needs to be part of strategic human resources planning'. As a company looking to recruit talent, it is most important to present your enterprise, and its core values, as clearly as possible; to use marketing as a first step – and today there are plenty of opportunities to do so, on- and offline; and to prepare a job interview agenda properly and carefully. However, in the end, Tijnk added, successful recruitment is 'all about negotiation'.

He went on to ask: 'How do you know that the right people will apply for the job?', explaining that the answer is to make the application process as simple as possible because 'as an employer, you never get a second chance to make a first impression'. He emphasised that, once you have chosen an appropriate candidate, it is important to communicate quickly with the person in question. If you do not do so, a competitor company on the candidate's 'wish list' will surely snap him or her up!

'People leave managers, not companies'

As Gabriela Marin then underlined, empathising with the current, existing team members to motivate and retain them is, as indicated before, an equally important task for a manager as recruiting new members. While both monetary and non-monetary incentives and learning, and development opportunities, are key features in this central programme, managers also need to support their team 'in terms of seeing their world, appreciating them as human beings, understanding their feelings, and communicating your understanding' because, Marin said, 'people leave MANAGERS, not COMPANIES'. In other words, she added: 'Better retention involves communication, engagement, recognition, respect, and growth.'



Indeed Marin's presentation clearly defined, for the congress participants, the role of a successful manager in motivating and retaining employees today – the all-encompassing theme of the morning's session.

Management challenges in the self-adhesive label industry

After a break for coffee, inventor and leading businessman Johannes Höfler dug deeply into the practical logistics challenges specific to the self-adhesive label industry. Speaking on behalf of major converter company Ulrich Etiketten, he firstly highlighted sequence scheduling of similar print jobs in terms of format, number of colours, etc, to optimise efficiencies and save costs. He outlined the difficulty of implementing such tasks, and the complexity of determining which costs relate to specific

jobs, and discussed currently-popular converter scheduling choices with participants – and achieving their results automatically via an algorithm, or manually.

Höfler engaged in discussion with participants on another current high-visibility topic for label converters: raw materials stock management. Ideas for improved production planning and forecasting are needed for the future, and the way in which different converter companies manage this challenge raises the additional question of how the labelstock producers do it. As a rider to considering this subject, Höfler asked whether there are opportunities to instigate a cross-industry converter exchange of substrate materials no longer needed; or whether labelstock suppliers might instigate systems to buy back such materials, at a reduced price. Printed label overproduction for a variety of reasons creates an additional storage and management challenge, and Höfler said that Ulrich Etiketten's solution is to store overproduction quantities of printed labels 'over a certain' value.

The brand surgeon operates...

Interim marketing professional with a strong commercial focus Theo Toering, of Toering Interim Management, then explored the world of consumer products that he knows so well and supports as a 'brand surgeon'. His role is to assist major food companies and other brands to gain commercial competitive advantage -- because, after all, he said, 'they know what they want but they don't know why they want it, or how they want it!'

As a marketer with strong commercial sense, he has in-depth experience of the complex pathway that involves successfully establishing, defining, or repositioning, a brand, in terms of 'why, how, and what'. He emphasised that the 'why' question is the most important, and answering it will point the way to further action. He illustrated this fact through an exploration of his work around the international Chio Chips snack brand, which happens to be the most popular snacks brand locally in Romania. 'The world tastes great' was the product's launch pad, providing a different strapline to that of other snacks by encouraging consumers to explore new tastes rather than just have fun.

Expanding this case history, Toering demonstrated the value of using 'famous people' in brand promotion, employing a father and son celebrity team in a 'young and old' promotion for Chio Chips. This demonstrated that TV audience awareness is a strong differentiator, particularly since it can also mean that less financial investment in traditional advertising is necessary. However, with TV viewing figures reducing in favour of social media, the latest marketing promotional challenge is to attract the younger generation, so a 'multilayer' strategy blending online social media advertising and mainstream TV is a viable solution. Indeed, Toering's case history showed, the success of any branding campaign depends on the successful communication of what is wanted/needed at every level of the product's value chain – consumer, producer, buyer, agency, and, of course, not forgetting packaging and labels!

Focus on innovation



Once again Johannes Höfler took the stage – this time in his own right as the acclaimed inventor, among other things, of the Heliovis solar concentrator and the Vocier Zero Crease™ suitcase. Following on from a popular workshop during the 2016 YMC Congress, he explored ways of innovating in the self-adhesive label industry. Because the purpose of business is to create a customer, as renowned management thinker and writer Peter Drucker wrote, 'the business enterprise has two -- and only two -- basic functions: marketing and innovation. Marketing and innovation produce results; all the rest are costs.' Höfler defined innovation as 'the necessary

adaptation of organisations to societal and technical change', and drilled down into a typical major business innovation process. It would, he said, formally involve research, development, and commercialisation. All these key steps would be fed, at the interface between understanding the problem and developing modules for solutions, by a formal 'idea tank' established for systematic idea development using, for example, powerful, advanced problem-solving tools like TRIZ by an interdisciplinary team of experts.

Höfler also explored smaller innovations – perhaps better defined as product improvements – which could bring quicker results. Financial break-even could be achieved within two to four years, but with a limited return overall on investment, whereas the ROI on major innovations – although they could take six to ten years to implement -- would be ten times greater.

The practical modus operandi of best practice innovation was examined in depth, embracing pitchdeck workshops, internal prediction markets, and other management tools as part of the process. Höfler illustrated his thinking with real-life major company case histories which dramatically demonstrated successful innovation – both in terms of creating a redefined business model, and in terms of achieving massive organisational innovation.

In all industries, he showed, organisational innovation that encourages and protects employee involvement at every level can deliver significant results: happy employees who feel valued, are more productive, and stay longer in the company.

Having fun together

The evening brought the YMC team together again for a group dinner at a beautiful modern Thai restaurant in the centre of Bucharest, where the Congress participants were able to develop personal relationships, discuss the Congress agenda, and get to know, and network with, delegates from different areas of the label industry – in itself a truly valuable opportunity in a complex supply chain where collaboration and cross-disciplinary contacts are core requirements at management level.

Storytelling workshop

Next morning, it was time for a storytelling workshop with Antonia Silvaggi of MeltingPro, a group of professional project co-ordinators devoted to personal development of leadership skills. Her workshop focussed on developing participants' self-awareness and their leadership skills, in both a personal and business context. In this context, this fun learning experience appropriately took as its starting point a team which genuinely reached the heights: the crew of the Starship Enterprise! Delegates were asked to decide who they represented within the cast of Star Trek – Captain Kirk? Mr Spock? – defining their own view of their own personalities. They were then asked to think about delivering this profile successfully in a business context by examining what makes a 'good story', and why.



'Stories', said Silvaggi, 'are about information', and they need to feature, as well as strong characters, an interesting beginning, to attract the audience; images – not just facts and figures; good vocabulary; memories; music; emotions; and, of course, an end. The Harry Potter stories are, she said, a good example.

Workshop participants, viewing their personalities in the context of this complicated agenda, and bearing in mind that, as Silvaggi said, 'we are all social creatures', were then challenged to write their own stories, with a 'focus on why you do what you do in your professional life...' Her tips for success here were to tell the story from a personal point of view; ask a dramatic question; focus on a specific moment; deliver emotional content -- authenticity; and honesty.

After a full morning of deep thought into personal development, Silvaggi concluded 'Everyone can and should develop leadership skills... You never know where the opportunities lie!'

The Congress then drew to a formal close; and after lunch several delegates were able to enjoy an afternoon walking tour – the 'Beautiful Decay and Alternative Combo Tour' -- of Bucharest's unique combination of culture, architecture, and history, to add an extra level of food for thought before travelling home.

'We will meet the challenge'

Event organiser Elke Verbaarschot of FINAT shared the enthusiasm of the YMC participants for the programme 'This has been a really special event,' she said, 'and the contributions of the delegates as well as the speakers make me confident that the challenge of our industry in terms of encouraging today's young managers to stay with this industry can, and will, be met. Young managers will add new levels and directions of innovation, expertise, and ultimately success to our business platform, which is, after all, one of the key factors in modern living, around the globe: labels and packaging.'

More information on next year's YMC activities will follow soon.

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About FINAT

FINAT, founded in Paris in 1958 with headquarters in The Hague (The Netherlands), is the worldwide association for manufacturers of self-adhesive labels and related products and services. With more than 500 members in over 50 countries around the world, FINAT has much to offer to label converters and all suppliers to the labelling industry in terms of information exchange and in terms of international networking. www.finat.com

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