



Press Release

Berner Group focuses on expanding strategic partnerships

- **More innovations, more exclusivity**
- **Product management and purchasing go hand in hand in the future**
- **Cost optimization through internationalization**
- **New jobs being created in Künzelsau and Cologne**

Cologne/Künzelsau, March 28, 2017. The restructuring of the Berner Group is advancing more quickly than planned. The commercial B2B enterprise has chosen an approach that is clearly distinct from that of its competition. The previously regional Product Management and Purchasing Departments are now working centrally as one Team Europe. The focus is on expanding strategic partnerships with manufacturers worldwide. The Berner Group expects that fusing the departments into one strategic holding team will result in more product innovations, an increase in exclusive products and services, and additional savings potentials. In this way the company is sharpening its profile as an enterprise which is keyed in on its customers and on digitization. The Berner Group is looking to hire new employees for the new business area of Strategic Partnerships, especially at its locations in Cologne and Künzelsau.

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“The clear emphasis of our business model on the customer and digitization has strategic significance for us. Interlocking the core areas of product management, logistics, and purchasing on an international level will make us more innovative, exclusive, and at the same time more profitable,” said Christian Berner, CEO of the Berner Group.

In many companies there is the classic division of product management and purchasing. The processes then typically take place consecutively. “We are choosing a different, integrated path, because we want to become more innovative and at the same time would like to save time and money,” says Ingo Brauckmann, a member of the Management Board of the Berner Group and in charge of logistics and purchasing (supply chain).

Teams from Procurement Logistics and Marketing Management International jointly developed the new concept, which has been successfully implemented over the past few months. Instead of working regionally and across the different product groups – as previously – Marketing and Purchasing now work centrally at Berner for all subsidiaries and within defined product groups. These are ideal conditions, according to Brauckmann, to quickly build expert knowledge, form think tanks, develop synergies, and come up with innovations. Not only the close collaboration between the two core areas is new but also the international setup as a strategic holding area. This turns numerous regionally operating departments in 25 countries into an international team. Product managers from the Netherlands or Italy, for instance, now work hand in hand at Berner with buyers from Austria or France.

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“We have customers throughout Europe. With our strategic holding team we are lining up with a European perspective even in product development and purchasing. This allows us to recognize trends very early on to which we can react faster and in a more customer-friendly way,” says Dr. Dorothea Varlam, Senior Director Marketing Management. The purpose is not just product innovation but also the development of integrated solution packages, in other words, target group-specific products and service solutions.

To be successful, the new organization requires the collaboration of business partners who themselves pursue an integrated and innovative approach. There is no lack of them. The Berner Group has by now successfully started to, on the one hand, reduce the number of approximately 5,000 suppliers in Europe and, on the other hand, to expand the pool of strategic partners. “We want to collaborate more and more closely especially with those partners who possess the know-how and the ability to develop innovations in conjunction with us,” says Ingo Brauckmann, member of the Board.

To this end the Berner Group contributes something to the collaboration which product manufacturers lack and which is of tremendous interest to them – a sales force of about 7,000 reps. “Thanks to our sales organization, we know precisely and early on what craft businesses and industry need, and we have the power to sell the products we have newly developed together with the manufacturers, too,” says Ingo Brauckmann.

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For instance, in collaboration with a manufacturer in the USA the new department managed to implement a product series of novel boosters (devices for starting batteries). With these innovative products Berner now covers the entire standard product range in this segment. Car dealers get a starting device that fits into the glove compartment, and large brick-and-mortar repair shops now get boosters from Berner with many new functions.

About 60 staff members of different nationalities will work together in the newly created Strategic Partnership Division. Here the company is looking to find another about 10 specialists by the end of the year at the latest, mainly for its company locations in Cologne and Künzelsau. This is also where the lion's share of additional investments will go this year for expanding IT and for training.

The Berner Group

The Berner Group is a family-run European commercial enterprise. Our vision is: "We keep the world together and moving." This means we are the central B2B trading partner for all materials in the areas of maintenance, repair, and production for our customers in the building, mobility, and industry sectors. With more than four channels we create an integrated omnichannel purchasing experience for our customers. In the areas of steel and C materials as well as chemicals we are also an innovative manufacturer. We are represented in over 25 countries for our customers with more than 230,000 items and 9,000 employees.