

To Serve and Protect

With a rich history and a growing network, Grolls is bringing a new level of service and quality to the personal protective-equipment industry.

Images by Johan Jeppsson



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Grolls can trace back its history to 1832 when Captain Leonard Grolls opened his first workshop, L.Grolls Lärftshandel, in Gamla Stan, Stockholm. Following numerous mergers and name changes, Grolls, which was named Björnkläder at the time, was acquired by private equity firm Litorina Capital in late 2010. The following year saw the company change its name to Grolls, combining the capacities of the business with professional-wear manufacturer, Nytello, with ProCozz, a reseller of Björnkläder products. The purpose of all these structural and brand changes was to expand the company's network and create a more defined separation between the manufacturing and retail arms of the operation.

CEO and managing director of Grolls Hans Janzon has more than

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20 years of sales, marketing, and management experience in industrial companies on a global basis. "I am actually a geological engineer by background and I got a masters degree from the Colorado School of Mines. I had worked as a geologist for about five years. Then I worked for Atlas Copco, the engineering company where they sell mining equipment all around the world, for 12 years in various marketing director positions. I was later sales director at Rolls-Royce Marine for five years. I have been the managing director for Grolls for the past 10 years."

Throughout his tenure, Hans has seen the company go through various stages of growth and expansion. "When I came in, I had to be more of a jack of all trades and master of none. We had so many distributional channels when I first joined the company, but we have now focused on the retail

chain of Grolls. When I came to the company, we only had nine stores, direct sales, and various other sales channels. We now have 46 outlets and have grown from nine to 46 in 10 years. Today, 85 per cent of our sales go through the Grolls stores."

Another major change for the business came in 2012 when Grolls acquired Norwegian group Univern, which is one of Norway's leading providers of work wear and personal-protection equipment. At the time of acquisition, Univern had 12 stores and some 100 resellers throughout Norway. The company's revenues were approximately SEK 230 million, taking Grolls' total revenues from SEK 650 million to approximately SEK 900 million.

While Grolls has been proactive in its acquisitions, the company remains diligent about purchasing companies that fit the Grolls >





culture and purpose. “We are looking for businesses of commodities and people. It’s very much a relations business. The companies we buy and the managers of those organisations have extremely good personal relations with the customers in their neighbourhood. That’s an absolutely important factor and therefore it’s a condition. Although there were 46 stores, we have acquired 10 in Sweden, and we bought the whole chain of 12 stores in Norway. It’s a requirement from us that the owner stays at least three years with us when we buy the company.”

It’s been a challenge establishing the company’s network, as the Grolls name may be unfamiliar in some markets. “We have started about 12 greenfields so to say, but this is not like opening a new Marks and Spencer or something like that because we have to start with a white paper. The people in

city X don’t know the Grolls name, and so on, and we have to start a lot of marketing and canvassing in that city when we open a greenfield. It takes about two and a half years before a greenfield store gets to break-even.”

The Grolls network has grown substantially over the past few years, generating more than SEK 840 million in sales and 1.5 million garments. The company has 335 employees across the Nordic region, supplying 7,000 different stock items to 35,000 active clients. Grolls produces and develops its own line of safety helmets, workwear, and work gloves. The company has 30 of its own Grolls Occupation Stores in Sweden, plus one in Estonia, three in Finland, and 12 Univern stores in Norway.

Grolls recognises the importance of consistently communicating a clear message to its customers. This message highlights the company, its products, what it

stands for, and what customers are entitled to expect.

The organisation is driven by its key principles, which help Grolls better understand its customers’ needs. “I would say that we have high quality in everything we do. We have only the top brand names in all of the stores. We have a very close relationship with the customers and we are very solutions-oriented. If we don’t have what the customer requires, we get the product in a very short time. It’s very important that the customer leaves our shop with something that is at least as good or better. Service, service, service. That’s absolutely the most important factor.”

Grolls also strives to be an environmentally conscious company, actively working to reduce its environmental impact. Once a year, Grolls conducts an audit to monitor the impact of its production

processes. The results of the audit inform the company’s environmental program, which includes sustainability objectives, compliance checks, project management, and timetabling for achieving its overarching goals.

Through Grolls’ quality and environmental management system, the company ensures it provides the highest quality of services and products while at the same time reducing the environmental impacts that may occur during production, packaging, distribution, use, and disposal of its products. This includes Grolls’ use of shipping partners that are certified for environmental management systems according to ISO 14001, and a rigorous waste-management program that includes recycling and energy recovery where possible.

Targets are monitored and reviewed to continuously improve

operations. Measures also recognise the importance of employee skills, job satisfaction, and commitment as essential to Grolls’ success.

According to Hans, Grolls has an incentive program for store owners and all associated stores, which drives the gross margin. “We promote certain products that are best practice in the company that we make the best margin on and spread that message to all the shop managers. There can be new customer categories that some people were not aware of.

“I would say the shop managers get 70 per cent of the goods from our central warehouse. The remaining 25 per cent they buy on frame agreements that we have locally, and then they try to keep tight cooperation with those suppliers to give them a prognosis so orders do not come as a surprise to our suppliers. >



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“We constantly have at least two alternatives for our main products so we are not stranded if something happens in one country or the other.”

- Hans Janzon

“We keep a steady flow of goods. The remaining 5 per cent is such things that the customers want us to get for them that we don't have, but we get it to the customer anyway. We are very solutions-oriented.”

By building and maintaining close relationships with suppliers and partners, there is a collaborative process that goes into the end products that Grolls produces. “For example, we have high-end flame-proof garments that we manufacture in China, and then we search for fabrics and materials together with the manufacturer of the goods, and also cooperate with them when we set up the manufacturing of said garments.

“When it comes to suppliers, we live in a changing world, so we have to move around, manufacturing a little bit in Asia and also in Eastern Europe. We constantly have at least two alternatives for our main products so we are not stranded if something happens in one country or the other.”

Hans has great plans for expanding the company's network. “The future holds that we will, in the next five to six years, grow the organisation another 50 per cent. I would say that we will keep to the Nordic region, so more expansion in Norway and in Finland. It's a great focus on Finland where we only have three stores today. We'll probably end up with 12 to 14 stores in Finland.

“We have recently started a new company in the offshore oil market called Univern Solutions, and that market is growing by 11 to 12 per cent per year. That company alone will probably stand for 5 per cent or more growth. The only possible other market, I would say, is that we are talking about the high-end garments and high-end personal protective equipment in Northern Germany and Holland.”

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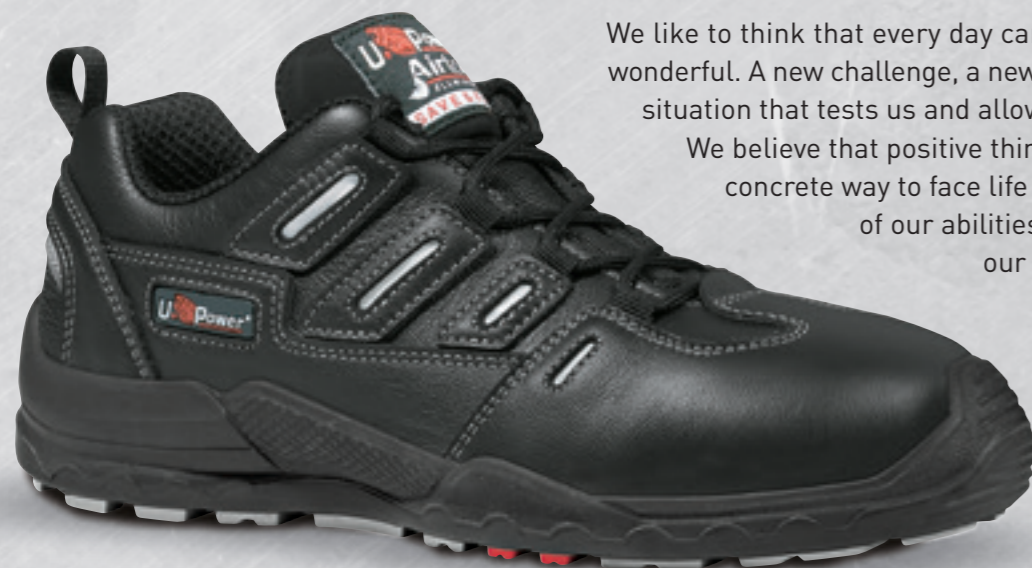
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