



As featured in
The CEO Magazine
For more info visit
theceomagazine.com

Clean Design

A forward-thinking strategy successfully steered Dansani through the tumultuous times of the GFC and positioned it as a prominent player in the European market.

Images by Peter Baastrup

Strong strategy and an influx of new energy into the management team have seen Dansani reach new heights in the last few years. As the company prepares to enter and expand into new markets, Dansani's longstanding experience and knowledge will form the foundations of its success.

The company first entered the European marketplace in 1983. Since that time, Dansani has focused on being among the world's best suppliers of quality bathroom furniture. The company's workforce of more than 200 employees consists of a variety of highly specialised professionals who understand what it takes to develop, manufacture, and market high-quality Danish design.

With headquarters in southern Denmark and production facilities spanning an area of 20,000 square

metres, Dansani has a range of bathroom-loving retailers and consumers all over Europe. As an international group, Dansani has a variety of subsidiaries and is represented in more than 20 countries.

Carsten Friis, CEO of Dansani, took the reins in 2008, just 30 days before the Global Financial Crisis swept across Europe. He took what some people would consider a risk, and invested in increasing stock, allowing the company to be able to continue their high level of customer service and short delivery times. At the end of the GFC, Dansani had increased its turnover and successfully survived the crisis.

The CEO Magazine sat down with Carsten to discuss the calculated risk he took with Dansani and the company's ambitious plans for expansion.

"I think there were a number of my colleagues that had a lot of potential new energy and when that new management team was put together we devised a strategy for the next five years."

- Carsten Friis

The CEO Magazine: You joined Dansani in 2008 just before the financial crisis hit. How did you deal with this crisis and steer Dansani successfully through the last few years?

Carsten: In 2008, we had the benefit of implementing a change in management and I think when you make these changes you open up this whole new source of energy for the company. I think there were a number of my colleagues that had a lot of potential new energy and when that new management team was put together we devised a strategy for the next five years. That strategy combined with a lot of new energy made the crisis seem not that significant for our company.

When you have a crisis, you batten down the hatches. We went the other way and increased our inventory to make our >



supply lines more secure and to receive benefits when our competitors went the other way. We just had the foresight to go the other way and at the same time I think we were in a situation where we weren't growing, and changes needed to be made. In 2006 and 2007 we weren't growing and so we didn't have a lot to lose. We benefited from the crisis and leant into it.

What advice would you give to executives about how to deal with a crisis and lead proactively?

I read something one day that said something like, 'On the other side of a threat is a possibility—if you see the threat soon enough'. I think that was what we were looking at. If you see the threat and you sit down and try to defend yourself against these things that come from external sources, you can also look at the other side and try to turn it around, or see if there are

any possibilities. I think that's what we saw, and what we did. That's what I would recommend.

How have you shaped and reinforced the core values of Dansani?

We are very much based on our core values, which are enjoyment, respect, and courage. When I took over I was very aware, together with the rest of my management team, that we should continue to build on these values. When we devised our strategy we were very sure that whatever we did had to be aligned with the values our founder made 25 or 30 years ago.

These values aren't something that you can simply wish into your organisation; you have to believe in them. In the management team, we all believed in these values and we felt that this was the right way of doing business and the right way to drive the company forward. It's not something that I would say we have to put a lot of

effort in to continue, as it's something that we really believe in. We simply did what was closest to our heart and mind.

It was already in place; we just had to shape it a little bit. If someone tries to do something that is not in accordance with the values or cultural behaviours of our company, then you have to stop it. We train new people in our values and ensure they understand their importance. Some people can't work in that environment. Sometimes people can't understand that we put our values before making money. Not everybody likes that philosophy.

How have you improved customer service and made it a priority for your staff?

Dansani has always been very focused on customer service. We live on customer service; we don't live on selling products, we live on delivering great customer service. It wasn't a big change.

When we implemented our strategy, we put a lot of focus and energy into customer service.

Customer service is complex. It's not only the phone that has to be answered, it's about the way we treat the customer when they first approach us and throughout our relationship with them. It's about helping them with their problems and maintaining our communication with the customer. It's the combination of all of these small details. We try to do the best in everything.

How do you collaborate with suppliers and strategic partners?

In the same way as we do with our customers. We have suppliers and we have partners, and sometimes when you just need a product or packaging material you can choose from 50 suppliers, so we can't treat everybody as partners. For those important suppliers that we have, we treat them as partners and we treat them like we do our customers. We believe that they are part of the chain and if someone in the chain doesn't have a good experience then the chain has lost something vital in its total value. We have very close relationships with our partners—some of them we have worked with for more than 20 years.

Where do you see the interior design industry and Dansani going in the future?

I think that we have to grow. The survivors in this industry will be companies that have substantial volume and competition power in the market. If you don't have the volume and critical mass then you can't grow. We have to grow, and all our suppliers and partners have to grow with us. I think we will see widespread consolidation in the market.

Where are you looking to expand?

We are looking at our main Nordic market and we want to expand over the next five years to be more of a market leader. We want to grow our presence in Germany. I think



Our business is a people business, and I think that our future growth and expansion will depend on the people that make up our business.”
- Carsten Friis



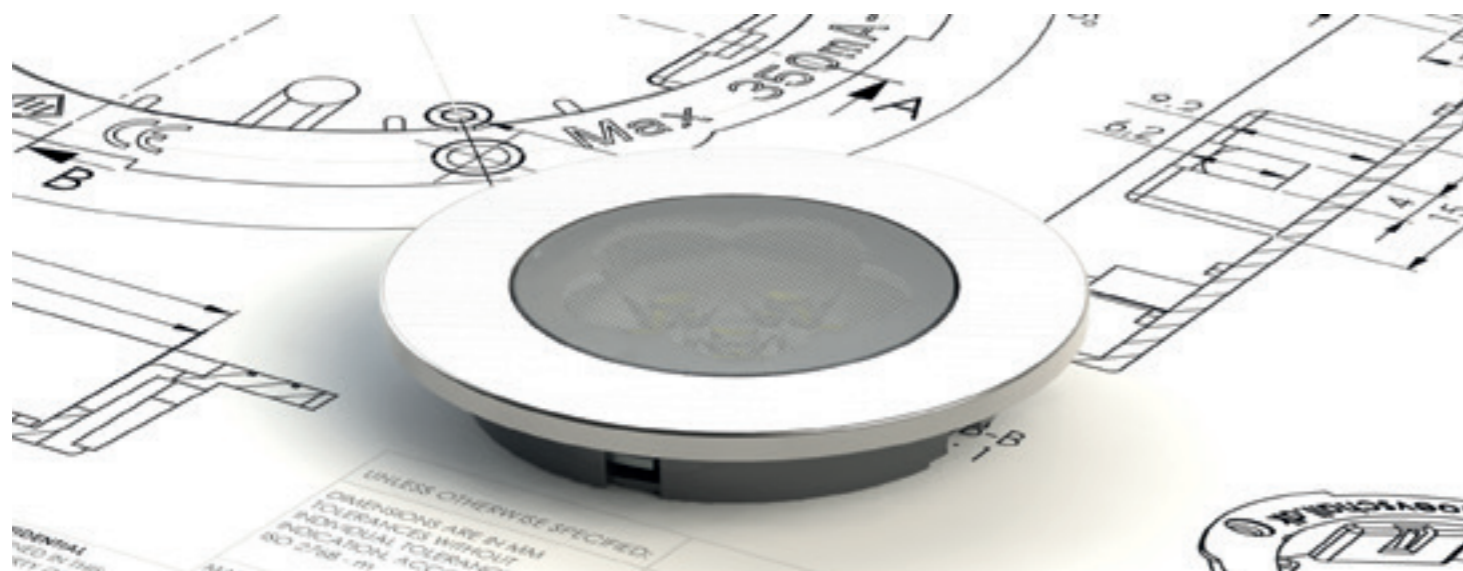
our brand has big potential in that market. We also want to grow in the markets around mid-Europe and the United Kingdom.

Finally, what do you think separates Dansani from its competitors?

The people. I think what separates us is the people working in Dansani. Our business is a people business, and I think that our future growth and expansion will depend on the people that make up our business.

We need to be competitive on each level throughout our chain. I think that we are in a position where we are so flexible that we always have the opportunity to be competitive. A lot of our competitors are production companies. We are a manufacturing company, but we use a lot of our suppliers and partners as production units, and source through them. That's what we've done for 30 years, and that's the way things have to be done in the future. •

SCANDINAVIA'S MOST SOLD LED SPOT FOR KITCHENS AND BATHROOMS



DANISH DESIGN - HIGH LIGHT OUTPUT - HIGH CRI VALUE

For more information, contact: +45 8711 4050

