

Local Knowledge, Global Solutions

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- Per Bertland

After almost 150 years of operations in Sweden, G&L Beijer Group has expanded its network into various parts of Europe, Africa, and Asia, bringing a new standard of wholesale to the HVAC industry.

Images by Andrew Clelland

G&L Beijer Group is a technology-oriented trading group that operates within the refrigeration and air-conditioning industry. The business is separated as follows: 70 per cent refrigeration, 28 per cent air conditioning, and 2 per cent manufacturing. Beijer Ref, which is part of the G&L Beijer Group, is the largest refrigeration wholesale company in Europe and operates in 27 markets across Europe, Africa, and Asia.

CEO and Managing Director of G&L Beijer Group Per Bertland came into the organisation's top office in mid-2013 and brought with him a wealth of experience across various industries. “My professional background actually started as an accountant for different financial companies throughout Sweden, following my university education.

“Before I came to Beijer, I was working in another listed Swedish company that was also a trading company, but mainly worked with sport products like shoes. For

instance, we had distribution for Puma football shoes and actually owned the factory for a while. I came to Beijer about 20 years ago and started here as a CFO. For the last 15 years I've been working more on the operational side of the business as the COO. I still have some accounting knowledge, but I haven't been working in that area for 15 years.”

The G&L Beijer Group has a long history in Sweden that stretches back to 1866 and has since expanded into various parts of Europe, Africa, and, most recently, Asia. “We are a listed company in Sweden and there are a lot of requirements that you have to follow in order to be listed on the stock exchange. We have a very professional board and a good team here that knows we should fulfil all the requirements needed to be listed—with regard to the information, the internal control, the accounting of the company, the legislation, whatever it is.

“When you are operating in 27 countries across Europe, Africa, and Asia, you develop different

requirements in different markets, so it's very important to us that we have a close connection with external advisers in the countries where we have small entities, and where we have big entities we have our own expertise. It's also very important for us to follow the EU standards and legislation; for instance, when we're working with refrigerants, there is a lot of regulation due to the GWP [global warming points]. We always try to follow, or even be at the front of, these environmentally friendly solutions, and try to offer the market more environmentally friendly solutions than what is legally required.”

Per has been instrumental in the organisation's expansion into Asia and Africa, averaging one business trip every week for the past 15 years. It has been challenging and rewarding for Per to see the G&L Beijer network grow. “In Africa, where we have a much bigger business than we do in Asia, when we entered the market in South Africa our big challenge was the distance from Europe and how to >



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"G&L Beijer is a truly international group with its unique footprint of wholesale, air conditioning and manufacturing operations. Beijer is the undisputed leader in their field of activity and strategically the perfect fit to Armacell thriving for excellence across the globe." - Malte Witt, Managing Director - General Manager Europe South East, Armacell

have control of the company. I think there is a long tradition of running companies in a profitable way and with good control from the seller.

"In this case, we acquired it from Carrier. When we took over that company we understood during the due diligence process that it was really well run. After that we appointed a management team in the company, which is an educated and skilled management team. In Africa, the difference from Europe in running a business was not as big as expected—very similar, I would say.

"In Asia, it was more or less the same. We've been in so many countries. For example, east Europe is quite different from west Europe. I've had a lot of experience with how to run it, and I think the best way for us is our distribution business model. Purchasing is global, but distribution, or selling, or competence, is local. In our

experiences, you must have local people to run the business. I think we have experience from east Europe being not as developed as west Europe a couple of years ago, so we can utilise this experience. I think what's most important is to have good, local management that you can trust."

With such an expansive network across the globe, Per emphasises the importance of local knowledge and experience. "We're a global company on the purchasing and procurement side, and we're a local company on the distribution side. We have over 50,000 customers worldwide and I would say around 3 per cent of those are from international key accounts, so you can visualise how local the business is on the distribution side.

"And we offer, more or less, exactly the same products in all markets where we're present. I think this shows you how global the market is on the procurement side and

how local it is on the distribution side. If you can be successful here on the distribution side you need to know the local roles, you have to speak the local language, you need to know the local people and local legislation."

While there are nuances unique to each of G&L Beijer Group's different branches, there is a universal sense of pride and connectivity that ties the organisation together. "With our staff, we try to have this atmosphere all over, however, with small differences. We can't have exactly the same philosophy for the staff in Sweden as we can in, say, South Africa, or in Thailand, or in Romania. All in all, we hope that the people working for us are proud to work for us. They're very motivated people and they like this business because, compared to plumbing or electricity, this is a very small business but very international. Whatever level you work on, you have international contacts.

That is very motivating for many people."

Per believes having close contact with the company's main suppliers is paramount. "We meet them, we try to have partnerships with our suppliers, we try to support their products and we expect that they also support us. That means we think we'll have a strong position in the market. Our suppliers are often not on the market because they need us to distribute their products, but we are on the market.

"Our people are around the market every day; we have close to 240 sales branches around the world and we have only salespeople, more or less, working there. They'll meet customers, they're in the branches, and they speak with customers every day. By doing that, they pick up all the new requirements, and if there are requirements from our customers then we can tell our

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suppliers what the market is demanding, and this kind of meeting helps suppliers with their product development and R&D."

Per is proud of the company's rapid growth and anticipates more of the same as G&L Beijer Group becomes a major player in the European market with a focus on creating the same footprint in Africa and Asia. "We are by far the biggest refrigeration wholesaler in Europe, and I think we're one of the biggest in the world in this field. It's obvious to see that Europe is changing. The transparency in Europe is becoming more and more evident every day. You have no customs, you have internet, so the transparency is total.

"To run this company well in the future, you need to have good collaboration with your suppliers, you need to be very skilled in logistics, and you need to be able to provide your customers with whatever they are asking for, and it has to be fast, efficient, and safe." •

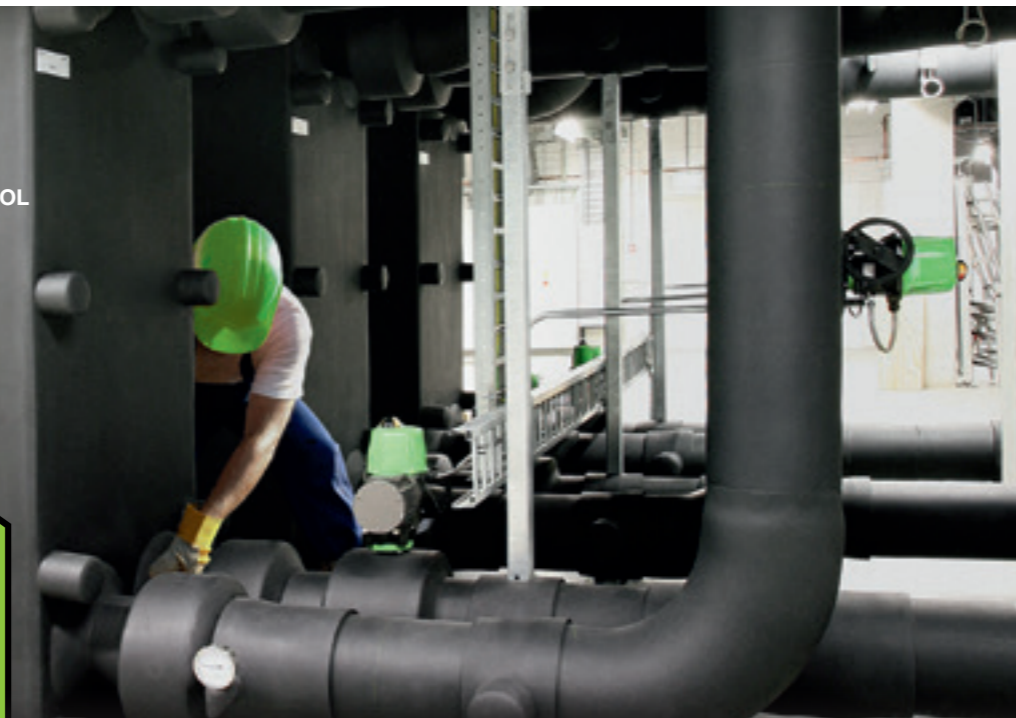
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