

SERIOUS ABOUT Amusement

Intamin Amusement Rides and Intamin Transportation provide differentiated services, while sharing a commitment to expert engineering and outstanding innovation.

Images courtesy of Intamin

Patrick Spieldiener's journey as CEO of Intamin has been a bit of a rollercoaster ride. Patrick's father, Reinhold, founded the company in 1967, along with his brother Robert and business partner Ali Saiko. Patrick has worked hard to nurture the company and launch it into emerging markets, all the while upholding Intamin's reputation for trustworthiness and innovation.

The CEO Magazine: Please tell us a little about your professional background leading up to your current role.

Patrick: I went to university in Zurich to study as a mechanical engineer. After graduating, I worked for a year and a half in a factory in the French part of Switzerland. The company I worked for was already a partner of Intamin, building tracks and prototypes for amusement rides.

After that, I was in Korea for nine months, where Intamin was contracted to execute about 15 rides for the biggest indoor amusement park in the world. I went there to help them install the rides, and act as a project coordinator. From

there, I gradually moved up to project engineer, technical director, and eventually to the position of CEO.

What is the biggest challenge you've faced since becoming CEO of Intamin in 1995?

The biggest challenge occurred when I was first appointed as CEO. After I was chosen to fill the role over another of the company's directors, the said director quit, leaving me to take over a lot of work. I had to jump in the deep end to get it all done.

Of course, I had help from the founders from time to time, but I was pretty much left to figure out how to get these jobs done. We ran into technical problems and teething issues with some of them, which was stressful for me and bad for the company from a financial perspective. It cost us many, many millions, and that loss was a big learning curve for me.

Why is it so important to develop and maintain healthy business relationships, and how do you go about that?

On one hand, we have our relationships with our suppliers,

and it's very important that these are healthy. On the other hand, we have our relationship with our customers, where we are applying our expertise to meet their needs.

Intamin's unique selling point is that we are developing a new prototype almost every year. This means coming up with a new ride, which is completely unique in terms of technology applied, speed, or height. We're doing things that have never been done before, and we're known in the industry for having experience in pioneering new first-off rides.

It takes a lot of trust for customers to invest in such first-off rides. They can word the contracts as strongly as they like, but at the end of the day, when they buy a ride from us, they're not just paying our fee. They are also spending on advertisements, building foundations, and everything else that accompanies the installation.

We are committed to building a high level of trust with our customers, because we are a crucial part of their investment. If something doesn't work on opening day, then our customers have to live with it for the next 20 years. >

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- Patrick Spieldiener



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Why did you make the decision to expand into monorails and urban transport systems? What challenges and rewards has this transition yielded?

In essence, amusement rides are a transportation system: we transport passengers, usually from point A, back to point A. Some amusement parks also wanted a little excursion monorail, so that people could ride along and see the park from above before they walked around. So the monorail started out as a part of the amusement attraction.

Over time, however, other businesses became interested in the monorail system—whether that was for expositions, trade shows, garden festivals, or shopping malls, none of which had anything to do with our amusement clientele.

We initially developed bigger and bigger systems under the name of

Intamin Amusements. But in the past five years, the demand for our system grew dramatically, which prompted our decision to split off our transport interests into an independent unit.

This allowed us to invest in and promote an enterprise that has very little correlation with the amusement industry. If the amusement industry has a bad year, then Intamin Transportation might have a good year. The clientele is different, and the durations of the projects are different, so the businesses complement each other very well.

Of course, there is still collaboration between the businesses; they are using the same engineers and helping each other out. Today, our transportation business, Intamin Transportation, is just as big as, if not bigger than, our amusement ride business, Intamin Amusement Rides.

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- Patrick Spieldiener

What are your company’s key values, and how do you ensure they are instilled in your staff?

Our key value is honesty. We don’t sell a product or sign a contract if we’re not sure that we can fulfil it. We are very clear toward our customers and our suppliers about what we can do, and how much time it takes.

Another key value of ours is being fault-tolerant. When we create our first-off rides, they are never tested in a factory first, because they are simply too big: it’s just not possible. So we design it, build it, ship it to the site, and hope that it fits, and make it work safely.

Of course, this means that sometimes we have teething issues, but afterwards everyone’s wiser. That’s why we always say, don’t be afraid to make mistakes, and don’t be shy about communicating honestly and openly.

How does Intamin invest in its staff with regard to training and development?

Our staff learn in the same way that I learned: we throw them in the deep end, and trust them with projects. We support our staff to make decisions about a range of possibilities, so that they learn on the job. For instance, if we’ve got a 25-year-old engineer coming in from another industry, we might trust him or her with a US\$10 million project from day one.

How does your organisation collaborate with key suppliers and other retail partners to achieve success?

At Intamin, our core competences are engineering, developing, and applying new technology. As such, we often subcontract some of the work that goes into the execution of our designs, like drafting and fabrication, to our partners.

For us, this partnership with suppliers is a key factor. This comes back to the risks involved in making prototypes: they make mistakes, and we make mistakes,

so we like to work with people that do not search for excuses but are willing to send technicians over to fix any problems as soon as possible.

If a company helps us out in a difficult situation, we will keep that in mind. We have been doing business with some of our preferred partners for 20 or 30 years. In contrast, the companies with excuses will fall to the bottom of our list.

What does the future hold for Intamin, and why is China the next big market for your business?

We have two futures: one for Intamin Amusement Rides and one for Intamin Transportation. For amusement, China is the big market at the moment: over half of

our work is being done for China, and about 80 per cent of our current proposals are made for China. The biggest parks in the world are being planned in China, in mindboggling quantities.

We know that at some point, though, the party will be over. We are already putting our heads together to consider what we’ll do when the workload diminishes. But we’re not pessimistic; other markets keep popping up around the world.

For example, we have been surprised about the amount of business we have been doing in Turkey over the last three years. Perhaps in the next three years it will be India, where the middle class is growing and they have more money to spend on entertainment and amusement.

We are working on some key projects for transportation at the moment, including a mass-transit monorail connecting Bologna’s



airport with its main train station. Bologna is one of the biggest cities in Italy, so that project will be a huge reference for us for similar systems going into the future. ◦

“Intamin is an extraordinary company. As a partner we are often confronted with unusual tasks. Experience and knowledge of unspoken challenges are required. The key to partnership is trust—trust that the partner will mobilise their forces to achieve success.” - Heinrich Hagenbuch, CEO, Oelhydraulik Hagenbuch AG

Mutual CONFIDENCE

STAKOTRA has been working with one of its best customers, INTAMIN, to bring something new, bigger, and faster to life. Over the years, we have become a market leader through our high quality of products, flexibility, and reliability.

This partnership resulted in setting several world records in the building of rollercoasters, and has brought fun into people’s lives.

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“More than a quarter century of working together! Our thanks to INTAMIN for the tremendous partnership and collaboration.”

Heinrich Hagenbuch



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