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Vegan: at full steam

Submitted on Tuesday, 1 September 2015



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By Annemarie Kruse



Veganism continues to be one of the major influences in the European organic industry. In Germany especially, vegan food is trending very strongly. In the country's capital veganism has already become part of the mainstream. No other city in Germany has so many vegan cafés, restaurants and retailers than Berlin. And supermarket chain Veganz has played a crucial role in this development.

In just four years, the Berlin-based Veganz chain has become the biggest Vegan supermarket retail group in Europe. The company operates ten stores in Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic, has its own food label and successfully distributes its products in several of Germany's biggest supermarket and drugstore chains.



Founder Jan Bredack explains how the Veganz group began: "I was a manager, working for car manufacturer Daimler Benz in Germany. In 2008, I had a burnout and took some time off. Then I fell in love with a woman who was a vegetarian, so I tried out the vegetarian lifestyle and soon afterwards became a vegan. Back then it was difficult finding vegan foods, and I stood in the grocery store wondering which products I could buy – and that is when I hit upon the idea of opening a vegan supermarket! We found a suitable location in Berlin, found investors, staff and products and in early 2011 opened the first Veganz store in Berlin's

Prenzlauer Berg neighbourhood."

The store was an immediate success. On opening day, it was almost mobbed by excited consumers. Today, the chain has 170 employees and operates eight stores in Germany, three of them in Berlin. In June 2014 Veganz opened its first supermarket in Vienna, the Austrian capital, followed just one month later by a Veganz store in Prague in the Czech Republic.

The Veganz stores sell around 4.500 products from 400 brands sourced from different countries. The ma-

jority of the products are certified organic. The portfolio includes a broad range of frozen and convenience foods as well as cosmetics, household cleansers, personal care and even pet foods. Interestingly enough, Veganz' customers do not just include vegans but also consumers suffering from specific food allergies and intolerances.

Bredack explains: "During the first two years we concentrated on establishing work processes, developing relationships with manufacturers, finding new brands and, of course, running our supermarket. In 2013, the financial situation was solid enough to expand, and we started opening additional Veganz outlets."

In 2014, Veganz stepped up the pace. Besides opening its first international stores, the company began distribution in some of Germany's biggest supermarket chains, including Edeka, the Kaisers Tengelmann chain, discounter chain Netto, the Globus hypermarkets, and wholesale retailer Metro.

In April 2015, Veganz launched its own food brand: the range currently includes some 50 sku, but the company says that eventually the line-up will feature some 300 plant-based products.

Bredack explains: "Our goal is to make it easy for customers to try out vegan food, to make vegan products accessible to everyone. We are doing that by opening our own stores but also through distribution in conventional supermarket retail".

Veganz currently has some 580 POS in Germany and continental Europe. In most of these outlets, Veganz sells the brands under its corporate logo in a dedicated product shelf. The first major distribution partner was Kaisers Tengelmann with 180 stores in late 2014; the most recent distributor is Metro's Cash & Carry wholesale stores. With the Metro group distribution agreement, Veganz has taken the first step into the potentially very lucrative wholesale and food service market.

And this July, the company announced that it had struck an exclusive distribution deal with Germany's largest drugstore chain DM. Under the terms of the agreement, Veganz will distribute a portfolio of vegan brands, sports foods, supplements and superfoods in 54 DM outlets across the country. If the trial is successful, the Veganz portfolio will be rolled out across further DM stores.

Bredack comments: "At the moment, superfoods are the biggest trend – this is also the reason we have developed an exclusive superfoods and health foods portfolio for our latest distribution partner DM. The DM line-up will be unique to the German market. Convenience is also a growing trend since to-go products are becoming increasingly important for many consumers, including vegans."

With 1,686 German stores, DM is the market leader in Germany's highly competitive and constantly growing drugstore channel. The retailer operates an additional 1,453 outlets in 11 European countries, which makes DM a force to be reckoned within European health and beauty retail, too. As such, the chain is a valuable distribution partner.

And Veganz is already thinking far beyond the European market. Bredack says: "At the moment we are planning our entry into the US market. And I can imagine a global expansion – after all, the popularity of vegan products is growing continuously across the world." The Veganz team will be attending BIOFACH America – All Things Natural, co-located with Natural Products Expo East in Baltimore, September 15-17th.

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