

THE FLYING DUTCHMEN



Tailor-Made Studios (TMS) is something of an enigma in the greeting card world, but a sizable one, supplying around 100 card publishers internationally with curated collections.

Over £80 million worth of its greeting card designs are sold every year in retailers all over the world. It has been at a significant global player for 25 years, and, as from the start of 2019, is making a foray into design-led stationery under The House of Stationery brand.

With its founder Ron Schumann using the milestone to prepare to step back from the day to day running of the business, handing over the reins to his son Vincent, PG thought it was time to learn more about this 'under the radar' powerhouse.

The Dutch have been revered as global traders for hundreds of years. It was back in the 17th century, the so-called 'Dutch Golden Age' that the Netherlanders soared to prominence as global leaders in trade, the arts and science.

Ron Schumann chuckles at the suggestion that in Tailor-Made Studios (TMS), the company he founded in 1993 in the Netherlands, has continued this legacy through greeting cards.

"I suppose yes, the Dutch have always been pretty good at the opportunities of international trade, but it has changed a bit since the 17th century!" quips Ron.

TMS' place in 'the global greeting card history book' goes back to its inception 25 years ago when Ron, drawing on his 15

years' experience in the greeting card world (latterly heading up the European operations for Hallmark), grasped the opportunity to set up a company that would become a design supplier and producer for card publishers all over the world.

This different model, whereby TMS would create a diverse design portfolio, which could then be curated for select card publishers all over the world, still continues to this day.

"We now have some 100 customers (ie card publishers) with whom we work ensuring some degree of exclusivity. In larger markets, such as the UK, we may work closely with say three publishers as customers, while in other territories which have smaller card markets, such as say Brazil or Iceland, we have one customer," elaborates Ron, with



Moving into stationery

This year, for the first time, TMS is exhibiting at Spring Fair, marking its 25th anniversary by debuting a new strand to the business. Under the brand, House of Stationery, the company is now looking to translate what it has done on the card front into stationery.

"We have been planning this for some time," says Vincent Schumann. "There is a real hype at the moment about stationery. It seems the more we use our phones, the more we appreciate tangible paper products, like greeting cards and stationery. This is surely good news!"

The resultant collection, which comes under The House of Stationery brand includes various formats of notebooks, planners, memo boxes, card wallets and sticky notes, available in a number of collections (including three designs licensed from Paper Salad), but its publisher customers will also have the option of featuring their own designs on the products.

Above: TMS' customers can either select 'off the shelf' or have stationery items made with their own designs.

Below: Two of the licensed Paper Salad designs that appear within The House of Stationery portfolio.



Right: TMS is now looking to replicate what it has done on cards in stationery.
Below: TMS will be exhibiting at Paperworld in Frankfurt in January and at Spring Fair in February.

the House of Stationery
by TMS International B.V.



its UK 'customers' including Pigment, CBG, GBCC and Carousel Calendars.

The key, to Ron's mind, has always been to have designs that cater for the different tastes of each nation.

"Everything has to start with the design, the right design for the territory. For this reason we have built up a vast team of designers from all over the world, some of whom work in our in-house studio but many more are off site. This way we know that we can offer designs that reflect the aesthetic cultures of anywhere in the world," assures Ron.

As well as its 'home' generated designs, this year sees TMS also offer Carte Blanche Group's Hotchpotch designs to customers in Europe and has also forged a link with Paper Salad for some of its ranges for Europe too.

Added to TMS' vast and varied design portfolio, which in 2019 will span 1,000 different designs, is TMS' production nous and capabilities.

Its facilities in China take lenticular design to another dimension - "Forget 3D,



we can do 5D now! We have done 350,000 of one Me to You design alone," says Ron - while the sound and light capabilities that are now achievable are equally amazing.

However, for all these 'whistles and bows', Ron still has the utmost respect for creating a beautiful, well-produced greeting card.

"Quality is what is important, in design and production. We recently bought a cold foil machine in Florence and had it shipped out to China; we buy in top of the range board as it makes such a difference to how a design can look," says Ron.

Surprisingly, Ron says it was the last

Above: One of TMS's customers is CBG. Right: Ron (left) and Vincent Schumann during a recent visit to the UK. Below: Some 1,000 card designs will debut from TMS for 2019.

recession that helped to shape TMS for the better.

"Back in 2010/2011 we had a recession in Holland, but being an international company we also had to deal with all the recessions in other countries too. The pressure was on to do 'cheap, cheap, cheap' and we realised that this was not the best route forward, so we said goodbye to 26 customers and concentrated on taking our offer more upmarket. It has worked well so far, both for us and our customers, and long may it continue," says Ron, a true Dutch global trader if ever there was one!



Like father, like son

It is hard to believe that the human whirlwind that is Ron Schumann is going to 'slow down' and hand more of the day to day running of the business to his son Vincent and the senior management team.

Ron wouldn't be even considering it did he not have a 'replacement' he knew incredibly well and trusted implicitly to continue the company values and treasure its customer relationships.

Having worked together in the company for 20 years (and obviously known each other since Vincent took his first breath), the succession plan is a solid one.

Vincent has earned his spurs - as TMS' sales director he has travelled the world, visiting customers for years and even more significantly lived in Hong Kong for a three-year period to oversee the setting up of its operation in China.

The two share easy banter, and Vincent is full of praise for his father.

"Of course my Dad is my Dad, but over the years he has become my mentor, my business partner and maybe more importantly my best friend. We share everything and discuss everything.

Admittedly, when it comes to business he tends to take 'the old school' approach while I opt for a more modern fashionable approach, but that has worked very well over the years as we have an enormous amount of respect towards each other.

After working 20 years together we understand each other much better than ever before, especially when we handle customers together. Besides that we always have great fun when we travel together."

It has been through travelling together on business that Ron has been able to impart his knowledge and winning business approach to his son.



So what lessons has Vincent learned from his father that will stand him in good stead as he takes over the running of the business?

From a teaching perspective: "We have travelled all over the world together in order for me to learn each and every culture and ways of doing business on different levels.

He [Ron] showed me why certain collections work in one country and not in another country, because of tastes, culture, handwriting etc, highlighting the importance of having diversity within our collection. This brought home to me the importance of us creating a team of designers from different countries and continents, enabling us able to supply over 40 countries with designs that really work in each territory."

From a sales perspective: "He has taught me to always look for high end products where everybody can earn something. To offer diversity in products which nobody else has or can produce; be different from the rest!"

From a customer perspective: "It is important to always think with the customer and maybe more importantly think for the customer. Prepare yourself before a meeting and surprise your customer."

From a managing perspective: "We are all equal, we stand next to each other hand in hand as a strong force, and not in front or behind each other because of title. We have to do the job together!"

One of Vincent's main focus for 2019 will be the UK. When prompted as to what he likes about the UK, Vincent says, "Each and every time I drive through the UK it amazes me how beautiful the small towns are. Up till now my best UK experience has to be my trip to Wimbledon with Dad. It was simply was fantastic, from Centre Court to Henman Hill, the ambience of Wimbledon is one of a kind!"