

The breakfast table invention

While trying, with a conventional knife, to carefully take some butter out of its modern packaging and spread it as thinly as possible on my bread roll, I was reminded of my father and of how he used to complain every time the knife wasn't able to reach right into the edges of the glass butter dish, always leaving a sliver of butter behind. He was delighted when at last he found a level butter dish in a hardware store. I wondered why, despite today's abundance of practical household gadgets, nobody had ever thought about modern packaging for butter and soft cheese.

Prototypes

At first, just for fun, I began investigating useful and more complex actions performed at the breakfast table. As a handicraft teacher, I was able to make what were at first primitive prototypes out of cardboard and Perspex, much to the amusement of my family, of course. I soon discovered, however, that the knife's special shape meant I could also use it as a cheese knife to cut myself a piece of cheese from the cheese platter in the middle of the table, without taking hold of it.

Protecting my design

My next port of call was the patent attorney, followed by visits to various firms and manufacturers. The frustration: Swiss manufacturing is too expensive! Once I had experimented to find the best shape, I sat down in front of the computer with a good friend to draw the knife and all its dimensions. He knew a workshop that could make me genuine steel blades. I had to get another company to harden and grind them. Again and again I was bombarded with useful or not so useful pieces of advice. Carried by my own convictions, and determined to be financially responsible about the matter, I took the next steps myself.

Material for the handles and chopping board

The prototypes had handles made of Corian offcuts (acrylic stone). Whilst looking for a suitable packaging supplier, the idea of making a compatible chopping board struck me. I had a few of these made and gave the knife sets to my friends for Christmas 2003. Virtually all of them passed the test.

Cheese makers, however, requested a wooden design, and, one of many tourists at a cheese exhibition, I hit upon the idea of using the red handle with the Swiss cross.

Development costs

By this stage, I had spent a considerable amount of money. In exchange, I had been rewarded with a wealth of interesting contacts and useful experience in the business world. At some point, I came upon the address of my current manufacturer in Solingen. In autumn 2004 I went there and experts examined my prototypes. I decided to place an order for 2,000 units with various handles. Now I just had to sell these knives.

Retail packaging

Searching for the best-priced retail packaging, I kept a watchful eye on the shelves, visited exhibitions and ransacked a lot of shops. In a stationery shop I found credit card holders that just happened to be exactly the same size as my blades and would protect them and also carry the small folded-up user instructions. In a small corner of a Christmas market, I made my first attempts at selling.

My first big sales opportunity was at the *Olma 05* and shortly afterwards I got a sponsored stand at the *Winterthurer-Messe 05* for innovative start-up companies.

My sociableness soon enabled me to supply the knife to firms who, with their logo on the blade, gave it to customers or their own employees as a gift.

Cheese specialists

A high point of my early sales was the Swiss Cheese Award and the Huttwil cheese market in 2006. The knife is already available in practical sales dispensers in various cheese shops and retail outlets.

The design of the knife is registered with the Swiss Federal Institute of Intellectual Property and the Office of Harmonization for the Internal Market and enjoys full legal protection.