



## **Interview with Marina Bartetzko-Meyer Head of Products, Marketing & Communication**

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Marina Bartetzko-Meyer has been a Member of the Board of Swiss Post International since 1 August 2007. She is currently in charge of the Products, Marketing & Communication unit with responsibility for the marketing strategy and annual marketing plan. She also develops new marketing and customer-focused products for Swiss Post International.

**“We have 16 years of experience in how to make an impact with a good offering and being successful.”**

### **Ms Bartetzko-Meyer, what do you do at Swiss Post International?**

The title on my business card is “Head of Product Marketing & Communication”. I am responsible for product design and development, marketing, marketing communication and brand management. My group comprises 50 employees who work in teams for the different customer product ranges, communication and commercial.

### **Postal services per se are basically interchangeable. How is product development to be envisaged in your unit?**

It’s true that the core service of a postal service provider is interchangeable. There is nothing innovative about transporting a letter or parcel from A to B. But if you can achieve large volumes you can earn money. In order to develop

this core service further, we look at the needs of our customers and ask ourselves: Why does a customer mail a letter or parcel in the first place?

**Can you give an example of a possible answer to this question?**

A hotel operator may want to target potential or former guests abroad. So he places an ad in an international newspaper or sends e-mails or a letter in which he promotes his offering. He may wish to send a former guest a card at Christmas. The technical term for this is international direct marketing. At Swiss Post, the corresponding range is known as Marketing Mail International.

**How does one develop a new product for a mature, saturated market like this?**

In the case of the hotel operator, he will buy address material for the direct dispatch of his promotional letters. But even with the best quality this is never totally up-to-date, as people tend to move from time to time. We now offer a service that consolidates all returned items and provides information about all undelivered items in a handy report. The hotel operator can thus save money with his next mailshot and use his (often tight) budget for the addressees he can actually reach.

**This sounds interesting, but he still has to deal with returned items.**

That's right, that's why we created a service for what are known as digital returns. If a letter is not delivered it is not returned; instead, the hotel operator receives a message in electronic form.

Even more importantly, we can help the hotel operator and other customers to avoid items being returned or to greatly reduce the number of returns. Our International AddressCleaning service ensures that recipients' addresses are up-to-date and that the letter reaches the customer.

**Is there an over-arching objective with this procedure?**

In terms of the core service, all postal service providers are comparable on an objective basis – as regards the delivery times and corresponding prices. The differences between the providers are minimal, so they are basically interchangeable. Because the Swiss domestic market is too small, we are at a

disadvantage compared with our peers in terms of production conditions. The four providers ahead of us in the world market ranking for cross-border mail carriers all have large domestic markets behind them with the corresponding basic volumes. Our strategy is thus geared to enhancing the quality of service for customers, offering as many customer processes as possible and thus negotiating prices for entire service packages. In this way we don't have to enter into discussion about a few centimes here and there for our core service.

**Is this a strategy that your international competitors are pursuing too?**

In some cases, yes. In this field, however, we are one of the most innovative service providers. We have 16 years of experience in how to make an impact with a good offering in markets where the brand is relatively unknown and in being successful.

**How do you obtain good market data about the countries in which you operate while protecting resources at the same time?**

We first look at the customers we have in Switzerland. Based on our market share in Switzerland and the long-standing customer relationships, we have a clear picture and can evaluate needs in the export segment accurately. We offer the services developed on this basis in our international markets. With our global sales strategy we have set up a process in which we can evaluate feedback from international sales and incorporate it into adjustments to our product ranges. This involves close cooperation with Logistics and Finance in terms of implementation.

**How long does it take to develop a new product?**

That depends on the product. The digital returns project took seven months from day one until it was ready for communication in the market. If a product needs considerable support from IT it may take eighteen months. Another example: outside Switzerland we do not have any acceptance points of our own but usually only a head office. If a customer wants to mail items directly through us we would have to collect them from his premises. For greater convenience we offer "pick-up envelopes": these are prefranked envelopes in

which he can place smaller items and send them to us. A service of this type becomes a finished product within six months.

**How do you observe the competition – after all, it's hardly possible to take out a patent on postal services?**

We use customer surveys but we also look beyond the garden fence and if one of our competitors offers a good service we try to offer a better one.

**Are there any service innovations in your business?**

Innovation is a big word. What is also important is the speed with which one adapts to new customer needs and successfully launches new products.

**How many resources do you have to use for market monitoring?**

We have one employees whose sole task is to observe the market. She evaluates databases, observes product communication and the annual reports of our competitors. This information is bundled for each competitor and incorporated into our marketing plans and strategies. As part of this process we have discovered that we must observe not only our traditional competitors but also companies operating in the near-postal segment. One example is producers of franking machines who want to extend their value chain into the service sector. They are close to our customers and must therefore be taken seriously as competitors. We must also always keep sight of opportunities: it's possible that by using them we can guarantee an even better customer service.

**Are there any national characteristics that you have to bear in mind in terms of marketing?**

Yes, there are. We often have heated discussions about them in the various countries. Depending on the market situation there are things that one cannot sell actively at the same level in all countries. We sell classic lettershop services actively in Austria, but this would not work in Germany because many lettershops there are among the direct customers of Swiss Post International. We always have to be very precise and see where we begin to compete with

our own customers when extending the value chain. Our strategy is “The same products for all markets”, but cultural characteristics often make a difference when it comes to implementation.

**Are your activities aimed at extending the value chain profitable or an investment in binding customers to the core process?**

That varies slightly from country to country. But we can see that value-added services very often serve as a selling point that enables us to sell the core process in the first place. The question of profitability in terms of just the individual step in the value chain does not arise in this sense.

**Do you have personal goals that you want to achieve on behalf of Swiss Post International?**

The product management team at Swiss Post International is the development department. We play the part of the innovation engine and are thus a key success driver. My goals have to do with customer focus, with even more specific offerings for certain sectors and markets and ultimately with even better support for our sales activities.

**You have been at Swiss Post for 16 years. Were you always doing the same job?**

When Swiss Post International was established in 1996 I was the 34<sup>th</sup> employee and the first with a marketing background. I was therefore able to help shape the marketing strategy and customer communication at Swiss Post International from the outset. I was also able to work on the first Swiss Post website. My current position and the responsibility for the entire team is, for me, the result of my many years of working in different functions and projects. I very much appreciate the fact that Swiss Post enables me to work part-time in a management position, so that I can continue my career during this stage of my life that requires me to devote time to my family and children.

**Have mistakes sometimes been made in terms of developing the business? Were there any interruptions in the success story of Swiss Post International, at least as regards product development?**

Recently, I was looking at some older working documents. I saw that as far back as more than seven years ago we laid the foundations for a high level of customer focus and the qualitative enhancement of our core services. I can't remember a genuine flop. That is one result of our gradual and rather cautious approach as regards product development – as well as step-by-step market expansion. For each new country added to our sphere of activities we have taken time and gathered experience before moving into yet another country. We are now in a phase of consolidation and are trying to bring our vision, business behaviour and identity in the market into a uniform line that is still compatible with the market.

**Is this gradual expansion a typical Swiss characteristic?**

Yes, definitely. We prefer to think things through carefully and review something thoroughly instead of acting hastily.

**Does Swiss Post have a USP?**

We don't have a single USP; we have a collection of individual measures and optimizations that combine to make our service unique. Our motto is to be a little bit better in everything we do. This is a task that applies not only to marketing but to everyone who works at our company. A USP can't be that we deliver a letter three hours faster from Italy to Germany. Our USP has to be to answer the telephone faster, to prepare a quotation especially carefully, but of course also to offer appropriate delivery times and finally to treat customers with courtesy – whether they are the senders or the recipients of an item. At the end of the day, the sum of all positive commitments makes the quality of our service. That's our USP.

**What is currently your greatest challenge?**

Brand management: we have to make the Swiss Post brand better known abroad. Our task is to raise recognition of the brand with limited resources; we

don't have the funds for large-scale campaigns. We are therefore focusing on neighbouring countries for the time being. But we are also facing fierce competition in the Nordic countries and especially in the Netherlands and must continue to strengthen our brand's profile.

**Ms Bartetzko-Meyer, thank you for this interview.**

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