



# Love of one's homeland is like the salt in the soup

## “Deutsches Salinekontor GmbH” markets identity-establishing products from Halle

Salt and the city of Halle an der Saale in Saxony-Anhalt are two things that belong together. The city's valuable natural resource is an influence on the place's past and present. At its founding four years ago, “Deutsches Salinekontor GmbH” (DSK) set itself the task of marketing salt products and their history. In cooperation with the museum Technisches Halloren- und Salinemuseum and the Salt-Workers' Fraternity, it is carrying out its mission successfully: establishing tasty regional products on the market. The DSK has now become a “hub” for products that are “from here”, of high quality and historically connected with the region.

Since the Middle Ages, the inhabitants of Halle have drawn highly concentrated brine from wells 14 to 35 metres deep and operate the plants of two salt works. The city's most important branch of industry is documented by the Technisches Halloren- und Salinemuseum. It is one of the sights of the city. Boiling pan, drying pan and filling equipment: here, work is still carried out as in the 19th century, and history is shown, told and made visible. And: salt is regularly produced here, and not just for demonstration and souvenir purposes. This is unique for a museum in Europe. With an annual production of around 100 tonnes, the Technisches Halloren- und Salinemuseum is Germany's smallest producer of salt. The “Original Hallore-Siedesalz” extracted there is “eco-certified” and not just popular with the museum's visitors. Hallensian bakers, butchers and eco-businesses are also among the customers. The demand for the special, soft salt from Halle has been growing for several years now.

It consists of 98 percent sodium chloride, with the other two percent being made up of minerals. It does not contain additives, such as iodine, whitening agents or anti-caking agents, which are frequently to be found in other salts.

When the Salt-Workers' Fraternity approached industrial designer Tino Alferi a few years ago, it laid the foundation for the start of a regional marketing of this “treasure”: how can we become better at showing what we have? How can we secure deliveries? How can we make sure that we are not just promoting brine and salt, but Halle as well? The Managing Director of the Halle company “XIO Design”, who is now a member of the Fraternity himself, has answers ready for these questions: “It was quite plain to me”, says Alferi, “that we had to emphasise the region much more, on the packaging, in the marketing and in the logistics”. He had a rush of ideas. Images emerge, of spring labourers, master saltmakers and the inevitable spitz hund, which used to accompany the coachmen.

First on paper and then on the computer. “It is all part of the story and has to be told”, says Alferi. Together with his team, historians and the Salt-Workers' Fraternity, he digs out sagas, stories and anecdotes on the history of salt. Even now, he still often visits the city archive. What they research is “watertight” and is compressed into a catchy story for customers. “We have an incredible wealth of history, and we are using it”, says Tino Alferi.

First of all, the salt receives new packaging. On this, it is made very clear that it comes from Halle an der Saale – the city with the long history in salt. “The whole thing soon took on its own momentum”, recalls Tino Alferi. The products, combined with the regional marketing, were immediately in strong demand, in the saltworks and also in the stores. The next step for the entrepreneur, in 2012, was in turn “only logical”: together with three other partners, the inhabitant of Halle founded “Deutsches Salinekontor GmbH”. They thought, sketched and planned as if unleashed. “It was as if we had all been waiting for it”, remembers the Managing Director Thomas Staudenmayer. In coordination with the Museum and the Fraternity, they enlarged the portfolio.

The first products, such as the salt grinder, were created in only two weeks. It was followed by little salt sacks and salt cartons with windows. “We wanted to show everyone what we have got here and tempt them to try it out”, says Staudenmayer. “Thanks to the gentle boiling process, Halle salt is very soft. It dissolves in water in only a few minutes and is very easily digestible thanks to its pure composition.

The recipe worked. Retail chains started to stock this regional product. The “normal” salt and brine are followed by new products, such as the “German Pan Salt”, which is moist and popular with restaurant kitchens because it dissolves extremely quickly in water. In addition to the products of the Museum, DSK then gradually brought further products onto the market.

The beer became a milestone. “The salt boilers used to drink a lot of beer, because it was cleaner than the drinking water back then and was also better for quenching thirst”, explains Alferi. The “Hallunken Bräu von der Saale” set something in motion that became unstoppable. “We noticed that we could think even bigger and expand the range's diversity even more”, says Thomas Staudenmayer. One can quickly explain why the beer was called “Hallunken Bräu”, or “Scoundrel Brew”. Since the 18th century, people who moved to Halle an der Saale were known as “Hallunken”.

They then became Hallensians. Or “Halloren” – members of the Salt-Workers' Fraternity. So history is flowing again, into the clay bottles, which can hold 0.75 or 2 litres. The “original type” is manufactured in an East-German brewery, with a special aromatic malt mixture. The next step was high-proof. The salt herbal liqueur “Hallunke No. 2” was launched onto the market. At the Green Week 2015 in Berlin, there was the first opportunity to see and taste the new Hallensian spirit, which is manufactured with extracts of halophytes – herbs that grow in salty soil – and a pinch of original Halle boiling salt. It worked. Now there is also the “Number 3”.

Back then, the salt products of Saline Halle under the brands of the Salt-Workers' Fraternity stood directly next to the liqueur on the fair stand – as did the liqueurs under the “Der Templer” brand, the recipes of which go back to the Knights Templar. Why? “Well, the knight's order also belongs to our region”, explains Tino Alferi. The DSK has since taken over the marketing of many other products that do not necessarily have anything to do with salt, but have a connection with the city of Halle and the surrounding area. What started with salt products, has become a hub for regional delicacies and care products.

A retail chain based in Halle is helping to drive forward this enterprise. They are familiar with the DSK's work and encourage to help small and medium-sized companies that have superb products but would not have a chance on the market on their own. The team like this approach. “We are problem-solvers, we want this kind of thing”, says Alferi. “We would like people to continue to remember their identity”, adds Thomas Staudenmayer. That is why they are now looking after bath salts, honey from the high-quality bee-keeper around the corner, and the apricot brandy made from fruits growing on a hillside by the Saale. “Our products have to breathe regionality, that is our mission”, says Staudenmayer. That is why they only take products that are “from here” and have them produced by partners located in a close radius around Halle.

They take something that exists and pep it up for the market. Or they come up with something new again. Like the spraying brine of the Technisches Halloren- und Salinemuseum, also called “the little Halle for handbags”, which is a sales hit among the souvenirs in the city information office. Or like the little glass pig with a salt back, liqueur in its stomach and the little piece of paper on which the legend is told of how, long ago, a pig found the salt in Halle. Or like the “Hallensian Power Pack”, that combines several products from Halle (Saale) and which lots of firms like to use as a gift. This is how they want to continue. The online shop is to be expanded and the network of partners enlarged; further collaborations are planned and perhaps they will also soon be producing themselves. “The most important thing is that we love our homeland, we always want to communicate that”, says Thomas Staudenmayer. That is probably like the proverbial salt in the soup for tourists and natives.

Image caption: Thomas Staudenmayer (left) and Tino Alferi of “Deutsches Salinekontor GmbH” show a small product selection.

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