

Press information

Interview with Ali Eghbal and Gregor vom Endt, managing directors of haji GmbH

Mr Eghbal and Mr vom Endt, a management consultant and merchant and an advertising executive with international experience have come together to revolutionise the food scene. Where did the idea come from?

GvE: After spending years building a great business relationship and at the same time becoming good friends, we wanted to embark on something new in life together. We decided on products in the drinks business.

As a Muslim with Iranian roots and a German Christian, we wanted to create a multicultural drink that transcends borders and brings people together. On a visit to the Thaifex food fair in Bangkok in 2003, we got an overview of what was on offer in terms of drinks in the Orient and South East Asia. During this trip, we spent a lot of time thinking about the name of our product. And we decided on haji. Thus the idea was born.

Where did you meet?

AE: From 1996 onwards I worked for several years as a consultant to Gregor vom Endt's advertising agencies and companies. Over the years, a close friendship developed that has lasted until today.

Haji is a courtesy title for anyone who has made a pilgrimage to Mecca. Why choose this name for a drink?

AE: In its original form, Haji is indeed a courtesy title for anyone who has completed the pilgrimage to Mecca. Furthermore, in the Orient haji stands for an honest, good-tempered person who is seen as pleasant company.

The term Haji is used in several countries – whether a person is Muslim or has completed their pilgrimage to Mecca or not. It is often found as part of someone's name and conveys friendship with and respect for that person.

The term Haji can also be found in the West. In ancient Greece and Bulgaria, Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem were given the title. The Jewish minority in Iran also call members who have completed a pilgrimage to Jerusalem Haji.

The word Haji connects Orient and Occident, evoking togetherness and transcending national and religious differences, and is thus the perfect symbol to represent this blending of cultures and nations. This provided the final reason to choose the name. In the sense of the original meaning, haji cola and haji water will not polarise or separate people, but build bridges and bring people together.



haji
حجبي

What target group are you aiming for with the haji drinks?

GvE: Everyone, young or old, from Orient to Occident. haji water is healthy water from the Rhön biosphere reserve for people who follow a healthy, balanced diet. haji cola is aimed at the same group because it is sweetened with date syrup and pure natural fructose and therefore contains no refined sugar. It is also made with high quality water from the Rhön spring. The product pairing is aimed at a trendy, cosmopolitan, health-conscious and multicultural society.

You are launching a mineral water and a cola, isn't the drinks market full enough already? Aren't you in danger of creating me-too products?

GvE: If you look at the concept and philosophy of haji water and haji cola and the quality of the recipes, the question is superfluous. The water and cola, which at first glance appear to be at completely opposite ends of the drink world, stand out from the competition through a unique spirit and selected natural ingredients. Thanks to a homogeneous brand campaign, similarities are created which one could not at first imagine. The exciting dual nature of the products is highlighted by the use of the colours black and white, with each in direct contrast to its counterpart.

RhönSprudel is a well-known name in the drinks sector, how did you get them on board?

AE: Our brand campaign, our company philosophy and our unique concept enabled us to convince the owner of the company, Egon Schindel, as well as sales director Birgit Gleiss of the high potential of the haji brand. We were extremely happy to be able to gain as a partner such a renowned company as Mineralbrunnen Rhönsprudel Egon Schindel GmbH, which is a member of the RhönSprudel Group and brings with it a wealth of experience in the production and distribution of health-oriented and innovative drinks.

How do you intend to distribute haji water and haji cola?

AE: We will first launch the drinks in Germany with Bauer Fruchtsaft GmbH as distributor.

Do you also want to be active worldwide? What steps have you taken so far?

GvE: Due to haji being an international trademark and widespread domain registrations, we're in a great position to do international business. Furthermore, our established subsidiaries in Hong Kong and Tehran/Iran will provide important platforms for our planned expansion. The next stage will follow shortly.

Thank you.

Interview: September 2010



About haji GmbH

The Hamburg-based haji GmbH distributes both haji cola and haji water under the slogan "It's your choice". The internationally registered haji trademark will soon revolutionise the drinks market under the guidance of two experienced and innovative businessmen – Gregor vom Endt and Ali Eghbal. Along with selected, high-quality ingredients – especially in the case of haji cola – it is the philosophy behind the products that makes them unique. This is underlined by the extravagant look of the new returnable glass bottle which has been honoured with the Red Dot Design Award 2010. Top-flight partner for the ambitious project is the MineralBrunnen RhönSprudel Egon Schindel GmbH, a member of the RhönSprudel Group and in the top ten of more than 220 mineral water springs in Germany. And Bauer Fruchtsaft GmbH, a company with more than 80 years' experience in the beverage business, is responsible for distributing haji products nationally.

For further information, visit www.haji.com

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