

we in europe

For esco – european salt company staff

News: New websites online

We're all familiar with this situation: every now and then the house needs a new lick of paint and maybe some new furniture. And it's no different in the virtual residence of Vatel S.A. and esco GmbH & Co. KG. Since the beginning of the year, both companies have launched new websites.

Firstly, at the beginning of February, VATEL's new product-oriented website aimed at both customers and end consumers was completed. Accordingly, the website features clear navigation, appealing photos and animations and appropriate textual information. A page containing Portuguese recipes, all prepared with VATEL table salt of course, is intended to inspire young people in particular to enjoy cooking for themselves.

Carmen Luz, marketing manager for VATEL, co-ordinated the project and is more than happy with the result: "Although VATEL is already the most popular table salt brand on the Portuguese market, we can't afford to be complacent. With the new product website we have an additional medium with which to both communicate with our customers and acquire new customers, thus ensuring that when it comes to cooking, VATEL salt remains an essential ingredient in every Portuguese household."

The Portuguese version of the website can be viewed at www.vatel.pt. An English version is in the pipeline.

April saw the launch of the new esco website, as replacement for the company's former homepage. The section on products and applications, in particular, has been structured in more detail. In addition a new section "About Salt" has been added to provide space for a regular turnover of features and additional information, e.g. on the subject of salt and health.

"The new esco website is intended to span the range of information expectations of our international clientele. B2B customers naturally require more detail than, for instance, end consumers. In addition, there are also those visitors to the website who simply want general information on salt, its applications and processing methods", explains Bianca Schanklies, the person in charge of co-ordinating the project. The website has also been programmed with a content management system to allow the esco communications team (Jürgen Bunk, Manfred Koopmann, Bianca Schanklies) to enter or change contents directly.

The new esco website may be found at the same address, www.esco-salt.com, and is available in English, French and German.



Carmen Luz presents the VATEL website



Responsible for developing the new esco website:
Bianca Schanklies

Editorial: Winter follow-up



Erich Krug, Reinhard Dust

No question: this winter has not lived up to our expectations. Hardly any frost, little snow and this year – after two record years – the snowploughs and gritters have been mainly confined to quarters.

“Green” winters however are not that uncommon. We have frequently been affected by such weather conditions. For us in the salt business this is nothing new.

So there’s really no reason to complain. Pointing the finger at the much discussed issue of global warming is too simple: global warming focuses on much longer periods of time and the argumentation on climatic development remains highly controversial.

That said, it’s not enough to sit back and simply wait for the next record-breaking winter. The low demand for de-icing salt in the early months of this year and the anticipated drop in early bird purchasing for next winter will have a considerable impact on our results. Cutting costs and improving efficiency are therefore the order of the day, even if the other business divisions are still performing well.

It is up to all of us – through our own creativity and best efforts – to try and ensure that we finish the current year on a positive note. 2007 is thus a chance for us to put our team spirit and creativity to the test!

News: Controlling roadshow: costs and pricing

Since the beginning of 2006, numerous employees at both the esco headquarters in Hanover and other European sites have been informed about contribution costing and its application within esco.

With their course “From contribution costing to EBIT”, Dr Roland Runger and Olav Tholke from esco’s controlling department provided a follow-up to earlier training sessions on the SAP-based profitability analysis application CO-PA. This time, however, rather than focusing on the technical application, the course was designed to help employees “better understand the economic contexts as well”. As Dr Runger commented when questioned about the aims of the meetings, “Modern contribution costing supplies a wealth of data, which provide vital decision-relevant information for numerous departments.”

Another new aspect of the course has therefore been its conscious appeal to

colleagues from different departments. “We intentionally invited people from a variety of disciplines. Such a mix accurately reflects the everyday work situation. It also helped promote cooperation between Production, Logistics and Sales/Marketing in a team environment”, explains Tholke.

The Controlling Roadshow began back in April 2006 with a course in Alverca, Portugal. Afterwards the instructors moved on to train esco france employees in Paris and the Hanover headquarters team. The most recent stop in the series to date was a course held in Brussels in March for esco benelux.



Controlling is fun: Olav Tholke explains how you get from contribution costing to EBIT.

Market news: New sales outlet for salt licks

For the first time, esco has managed to get salt licks onto the product list of a major retail chain. French sports retailer Decathlon began stocking the 5 kg variant of the esco salt licks for horses in December last year.



“They fit!” A Decathlon employee stocks shelves with esco salt licks

“It took over a year to acquire Decathlon as a key customer for equine salt licks”, explains Vincent Morlock, the sales executive responsible for handling the sales and contractual negotiations with the French sports giant.

With some 30,000 employees, Decathlon is the leading sports retailer in France and Spain; the company’s retail network also extends throughout Europe, with more than 350 outlets Europe-wide producing an annual turnover of 3,5 billion euros. The French company’s own brands are a match for Adidas, Nike, Puma and other major sporting labels.

Decathlon’s equestrian sports section has recently received a face-lift. It forms part of the “Outdoor” division, which features all products required for open-air sports. Here too, Decathlon only retails its own brands and is therefore dependent on reliable service by its suppliers.

“We are supporting the marketing efforts of Decathlon, by producing a

“private label” (own brand) for the company, rather than marketing the product under our own name”, Eike-Normann Riedel, esco product manager for cattle salt and salt licks, explains the strategy of this business arrangement. “The appeal of the Decathlon name in terms of end consumer sales is extreme, which is why, when you consider the sales potential, a Decathlon label is the best option”, continues Riedel.

To date, salt licks have generally been sold to cooperative or private agricultural suppliers, or wholesalers. Direct retail sales, particularly at higher inner city prices, have previously been fraught with problems owing to the small quantities required per outlet. Thanks to Decathlon’s centralised European purchasing office, esco is now in a position to enter direct retail sales for the first time.

The customer consciously decided in favour of esco. A supplier was sought

that would not only guarantee a reliable supply, but also consistent high quality. “During two audits of the Braunschweig-Lüneburg works, Decathlon was able to observe the excellent quality of our products and our internal company processes”, reports Riedel. A social audit also formed part of the visits – the first time such an audit had been carried out in Grasleben. Vincent Morlock explained, “The adherence to social standards is of immense importance to the French company when selecting suppliers because this issue is vital in the modern sports retail sector.”

A significant tonnage of salt licks is expected to be sold during the first year of Franco-German cooperation. An expansion in terms of both quantity and products sold is planned for subsequent years.

News: Mining jubilee in Grasleben

On 8 December 2006 the Braunschweig-Lüneburg rock salt mine produced the 30 millionth tonne of salt since operations there began. This amount would fill a goods train stretching from Madrid to Istanbul and back again. At the same time, the works achieved its highest annual production rate ever – almost 800,000 tonnes.

During the early years of production the Grasleben works mined both potassium salt and rock salt. Only in the nineteen twenties did it slowly begin to specialise in rock salt. These days, Braunschweig-Lüneburg is esco’s only “pure-bred” rock salt works.

The annual production rate still only amounted to 200,000 tonnes in 1955; by 1964, it had already risen to 300,000 tonnes. In 1968, the works cracked the 400,000 tonne mark. The fact that



A bird’s-eye view of the Braunschweig-Lüneburg works

today each miner produces ten times more than a single miner was able to in 1955 is an indication of the high degree of mechanisation and the growth in productivity.

Congratulations, Braunschweig-Lüneburg!

Market news: Music to our ears – the end consumer business

“Oh là là! That’s what everyone says in France when they hear that you’re dealing with ‘la grande distribution’.” Daniel Ramey knows what he’s talking about, after all he’s worked for more than twenty years in sales with the leading French super and hypermarket chains.

Hypermarkets are a particularly French phenomenon, although they are currently spreading like wildfire through Eastern Europe. They generally have a much larger sales floor than most German supermarkets and also offer a broad selection of non-food items.

The main names are Intermarché, Auchan or – to name a British example – Tesco. The largest among them is the French retail chain Carrefour with over 7,000 outlets worldwide, approximately 800 of which are hypermarchés.

It’s therefore hardly surprising that such customers leave little to chance, especially when it comes to purchasing. Daniel and his team face a veritable armada of negotiators: one buyer is responsible for table salt, another for premium brands, one for the hypermarkets, one for the supermarkets, and yet another for the so-called ‘proximités’ or

convenience stores. It doesn’t end there: there is also a specialist for Internet sales, who naturally expects to have a say too. And we still haven’t mentioned the logistics representatives or – last, but definitely not least – the quality management executives and the auditors for each individual business division.

According to Daniel Ramey, compare price negotiations with ‘la grande distribution’ to armed conflict and “you need real musketeers to make any headway”. On the other hand, you could also regard it as a highly demanding artistic brief: “We are the conductors, who occasionally get the chance to conduct an entire orchestra.”

To ensure no wrong notes are struck, the marathon negotiations involving ‘la

grande distribution’ need to be completed by September – a never-ending Da Capo year in, year out, with up to ten meetings per customer.

“Owing to its experience of the end consumer business, esco france is excellently prepared for this unique breed of customer, we are familiar with the sector-specific systems: EDI, cross-docking, penalties for late deliveries, just-in-time deliveries and the special agreements surrounding discounts, refunds, advertising allowances and other similar phenomena”. Daniel Ramey is certain that esco france will continue to be successful in its dealings with ‘la grande distribution’ and only wishes that for once “there would be enthusiastic applause at the end of the annual concert series – assuming the performance was a good one”.



From left to right: Patrick Vanstappen; André Etcheverry; Daniel Ramey; Jean-Christophe Clar; Jérôme Grosjean

Locations: K+S CZ a.s. – esco distributor in Prague

The history of the Czech company K+S CZ is as short as it is turbulent. Founded shortly after the fall of the Iron Curtain the group company, responsible for managing the potassium and salt business for the K+S Group in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, soon became one of esco's most important sales channels.

“At the time the Czech Republic as such did not exist.” Gerhard Braunstein, board member of the Prague K+S subsidiary, recalls that when the Kali-Handel spol., as it was then known, was founded, the Czech Republic and Slovakia were still united as Czechoslovakia. “At the time we didn't even belong to the current group. We were a subsidiary of the Central German Kali AG (MdK)”, continues Braunstein. It was 1994 before Kali + Salz and MdK merged. By this time the former multi-ethnic state had already disintegrated and from then on K+S CZ, which was then still known as Kali + Salz spol., was based not in the Czechoslovakian capital, but in the political and cultural centre of the newly founded Czech Republic.

Since the early 90s, the state – which coincidentally has no salt reserves of its own – has also experienced great economic change. The pace of development in the Czech Republic has been rapid and shows little sign of slowing. Together with Slovenia it tops the list of former Eastern block states with a per capita GDP of over 20,000 dollars a year.

The salt team at K+S CZ has used the economic boom to its advantage: sales of salt for the food industry, water softening, gritting and snow-clearing services and for many other industrial applications have continued to increase, making it necessary to take on extra staff. Where in 1994 the Prague team totalled five, it has now risen to nine. Six employees deal solely with the salt business.



The Moldavian salt team: Miroslav Krejčí, Jana Kohoutová, Ilona Janouchová, Stanislav Svoboda, Markéta Schwarzová, Jiří Růžička, Jan Konečný (from left to right)

“We haven't yet reached our full development potential. In recent years, however, we have established ourselves as salt market leaders. This position will need defending in future, something we plan to achieve with consistent customer orientation.” That's how Gerhard Braunstein sees the prospects for the business. The recent opening of the deicing salt depot in Lovosice, which has increased esco's quantity stored in the Czech Republic by more than two thirds to around 60,000 tonnes, marks the latest stage in company strategy.

Total Quality Management: esco quality policy amended



Frank-Michael Nothdurft has thoroughly re-worked the esco quality policy.

Since the initial ISO 9001 certification in autumn 2003, the subject of quality management has increased in importance for both esco and its customers. In addition to the regular internal and external audits and the ongoing changes to national and international norms and standards, new expectations have arisen that have led to esco thoroughly re-working its quality policy.

“In recent months an increasing number of customers have requested written copies of company principles and standards that are far in excess of current certification requirements”, explains Frank-Michael Nothdurft, a member of the esco Total Quality Management team. “The impetus for a thorough re-working of our quality policy came from two audits carried out by major firms last year. In addition to the standard quality criteria, McDonald’s and Decathlon also requested informa-

tion on areas such as compliance and social standards.” They were specifically interested in adherence to employee break times and the prevention of illegal child labour.

esco naturally complies with these norms. For some customers, however, owing to the sector in which they do business, absolute proof is crucial: some industries are regularly accused of flouting social standards. “These customers want reassurance that social standards are a permanent aspect of our corporate culture, that they are appropriately documented and adhered to”, continues Nothdurft, “and that goes for the products esco manufactures, as well as for the supplies and services of our subcontractors.”

Spurred on by this development, esco has revised its quality policy principles. The document, available in six languages, will be on display at our facilities, published on the esco website and available over the company intranet. Copies may also be requested from all quality management staff.

“Noticeably new is the declaration by the managing directors, who undertake specifically to implement the social standards of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Social Accountability (SA 8000)”, explains Nothdurft.

These standards are not just something that is expected of the managing directors. They extend to all esco employees, requiring high levels of integrity and personal responsibility from all. “We are convinced this will enable us to meet the increased requirements and expectations of our customers, whilst greatly helping us to consolidate our leading position in Europe.”

Daily salt: Salt baths – wellness in the home

These days wellness – derived from the English words “wellbeing” and “fitness” – is generally taken to mean methods and treatments that increase one’s physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. Salt plays an important part in the process!

You don’t have to visit a wellness spa, however, to give your body a treat. Salt baths in the comfort of your own bath can work real wonders: Baths in salt-water (10–15 g salt per litre of water) are relaxing and have healing properties.

Salt-water baths (15 – 60 g salt per litre of water) have long played a vital role in dermatological treatment: they drain the outer layer of the epidermis, increase skin temperature, and improve blood circulation. This effect can also be used to treat skin diseases such as psoriasis, a method practiced by medical spas for centuries.

Although the perfumed and coloured bath salts available commercially are nowhere near as strong as therapeutic salt-water baths, the beneficial effect of salt baths in the home should not be underestimated: warm salt-water – in moderation – enhances the mood and improves the circulation at the same time. In other words: salt baths (re-)energise the body and rejuvenate the soul!





How our Sonnensalz used to look ...



... and how it looks now: modern design with a long tradition: the current Sonnensalz 'triplets' pure, with iodine and with iodine and fluoride

esco brands: Over 80 years of Sonnensalz® in German households

Our Sonnensalz® is a long-running success story: the Graslleben-based Gewerkschaft Braunschweig-Lüneburg, as the company was then known, submitted it to the Office of Patents for licensing in 1925 as “a table salt produced by milling rock salt”.

The characteristic sun first appeared on the packaging in 1949; this was followed by the registration of the first logo and in May 1965 a further graphic was entered, ‘sun rays with a circle’, which is still to be found – in a modernised form – on items such as the standard 500 g pack.

The name was chosen to reflect how the salt domes used for the production of our table salt were formed. The salt

deposits were laid down more than 200 million years ago: owing to movements in the earth’s crust, parts of the ancient sea covering sections of the European landmass became separated from the ocean. The strength of the sun’s rays during this epoch caused the water in these lakes and the ebbing waters of the ocean to evaporate slowly. Left behind were sediments, which today provide us with the valuable raw material for this vital mineral.

The career of Sonnensalz® has involved three locations and grades to date: the brand first emerged as rock salt at the Braunschweig-Lüneburg works. Later – during the 80s and 90s – production of Sonnensalz® was taken over by the Riedel works in Hänigsen, re-launching

the product on the market as an exclusive washed and refined rock salt. These days, esco’s oldest table salt brand still in production is solely processed from ultra pure vacuum salt in Bernburg.

Part of the Sonnensalz® success story is that this brand remains one of the most popular consumer choices on the German table salt market. “With Sonnensalz® and Feine Prise® we own two of the best-known brands in Germany”, comments Guillermo Carvallo-Risi, product manager for esco end consumer products. And: “Of course, we aim to enhance the position of these brands still further in the coming years”, after all: it’s tradition!

Preparation: 10 mins
Marinating time: 30 mins
Cooking time: 12 mins



Ingredients:

4 cod fillets
 8 sheets brick pastry*
 4 tablespoons olive oil
 1 tablespoon herb salt,
e. g. Cerebos herb salt for seafood
 1 teaspoon dill
 Juice of one lemon
 8 cherry tomatoes

For the balsamic sauce:

1 shallot
 Ground coriander
 Balsamic vinegar
 Olive oil
 Iodised salt,
e.g. Cerebos fine table salt
 Freshly ground pepper

With a pinch of salt: Cerebos recipe: Cod in brick pastry parcels with balsamic sauce

Preparation:

- ◆ Marinate cod fillets in the olive oil, lemon juice, herb salt and dill for approx. 30 minutes.
- ◆ Preheat oven to 200–220°C.
- ◆ Lay each cod fillet in the middle of 2 overlapping sheets of brick pastry (previously brushed with olive oil).
- ◆ Place 4 cherry tomato halves on each fillet.
- ◆ Fold over the pastry ends and secure with a toothpick.
- ◆ Place the pastry parcels on a lined baking sheet and bake for approx. 12 mins.
- ◆ Prepare the sauce: Stir balsamic vinegar and salt together, gradually add olive oil, herbs, the finely chopped shallot and pepper.
- ◆ Arrange the baked pastry parcels on a deep plate with the sauce. Serve with green asparagus or a spicy ratatouille.

Salmon may be used instead of cod.

It's even tastier if you use sun-dried tomatoes instead of cherry tomatoes.

*Brick pastry is a paper-thin pastry frequently used in Asian and North African dishes. It can be bought ready made.

