

Shisha Masters

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**SAY HELLO TO MY
LITTLE FRIENDS**

JOHANNES HEMING

&

PHILIP ECKHARDT



**HOOKΔIN
COWBOYS**

HOOKAIN exploded onto the shisha scene like a SWAT team raiding a crack house. They shook up the sleepy traditional hookah market with fans lining up to try their renowned flavours and accessories such as the popular Phunnel range. This month we speak to two young entrepreneurs who decided to enter the shisha world in Germany nine years ago and now they are smashing it all over Europe.

Johannes Heming was born and raised in Cologne, Germany. He studied Journalism and Corporate Communications at University and has been part of the industry for more than 9 years. Together with **Philipp Eckhardt**, they started a new shisha brand which operates throughout Europe and offers innovative new shisha products.

What is your business all about? At Hookain we serve the entire portfolio of a global shisha brand. In the tobacco segment we offer 3 different products: HOOKAiN [Virginia tobacco], BLAZE (Dark Leaf tobacco) and our two-component-solution FOG YOUR LIFE. In addition to that, we produce the well-known Hookain Phunnel (Lit Lip, Lesh Lip, Luv Lip, Lil Lip) in our ceramics factory in Spain. The combination of our brands stands for innovation, quality and progress. We combine lifestyle and fashion with the theme of hookah and produce our own fashion line in Italy.

Lastly, we also work with a very high aroma content in the tobacco and thus achieve extremely high customer satisfaction. Our aroma content tastes more intense and lasts longer.

You have very quickly grown to take on some of the many established names in the shisha world, What made you decide to start Hookain? We wanted to do things differently and offer shisha lovers worldwide an alternative that is modern and that resonates with them. Due to global growth, markets are changing rapidly and after decades of grape and double apple, people started craving more modern interpretations. With Hookain, we have created the company that we, as hookah lovers, would have wanted, especially from an innovation perspective. We think of hookah differently than traditional hookah brands, for whom we have great respect, as they have paved the way for us. Without them, we would not exist.



“BECAUSE EVERYTHING FROM THE TASTE TO THE NAME OF THE FLAVOR AND THE DESIGN COMES FROM ONE SOURCE, OUR CREATIONS ARE ALWAYS A HIT”

What roles do you each have in the management of Hookain?

Johannes: I take care of marketing, external communication, product design, recipes for our tobacco-flavors and handling our international business. Of course, all this is only possible with a great team behind us.

Hookain is known for being one of the most innovative brands in terms of flavours and packaging. What is the secret to developing new products? Firstly, our ideas are limitless. secondly, I'm also personally interested in product design and generally a person who likes to test boundaries.

We play a lot with different materials and are absolutely in love with details when it comes to packaging and design. The same goes for our recipes. In our Lemonciaga flavor, for example, four different lemons are combined in small proportions. Our flavors are all complex and there is a lot of research and passion behind them. Because everything from the taste to the name of the flavor and the design comes from one source, our creations are always a hit. In addition, we now have almost 10 years of experience in the production of tobacco and this knowledge naturally flows into each of our flavours.

HOOKAIN

Do you focus mostly on lounges or retail or home sales? How would you describe your marketing?

We focus first and foremost on bringing high-quality products to the market that bring a smile to the customer's face. We have a huge community across Europe. As a result, many consume our product at home. As we all know, that's where it tastes best. In addition, we are also represented in shisha bars with our bestsellers. The bestsellers differ from country to country. In the southern countries, people tend to enjoy creamy flavors, while northern countries tend to prefer fruity ones.

Can you remember the first shisha and shisha flavour you ever tried? I am 33 years of age and I enjoyed my first shisha when I was 18. It was Cherry Banana.

What is your favourite shisha flavour and why?

My favourite tobacco is not available on the market - I make it myself. It is a 100% Burley tobacco from which we extract a certain amount of nicotine in a special process. I mix this stronger base tobacco with a Moroccan mint and a dark muscat grape. The mixture is exactly my thing. Personally, a normal dark leaf is too strong for regular use.

What is the shisha scene in Germany like?

We are in difficult times. Dramatic changes are coming with regard to the maximum packaging size of 25g from the 1st of July next year. We, other companies, WPT-Verband and ESCA have joined forces and are doing everything we can to fight against this law.

What challenges have you had to face in the sector when building your business?

Those who grow quickly have to deal with many challenges - so does working with people and every country has its own challenges. So far, we have reacted well to all situations in the team and are also well prepared for the future. To go into detail here is beyond the scope. Anyone who would like to ask us something personally is welcome to write to me on Instagram @hookain.de.

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“SHISHA IS MORE THAN A WATER-PIPE. IT IS A LIFESTYLE.”

Has your project suffered from the Covid-19 consequences? How have you managed to survive through the pandemic?

In the beginning, we did not know if our supply chain could be maintained. But fortunately, we were able to continue to operate globally and supply all our distributors. Tobacco was still available in all countries during the COVID-19 period and customers were grateful. Many stayed at home to enjoy shisha. We tried to bring new flavors to the market in the first COVID-19 wave in order to introduce some variety to the grey everyday life of the people at home.

Why do you think shisha has become so popular?

In my opinion, shisha is so popular because of access to information online and its popularity with the music industry. Billions of people worldwide follow their idols on Instagram and many people with a high number of followers enjoy shisha and have made it popular. In Germany, many musicians even have their own brands, reproducing the theme of shisha in their music and making it popular in society. Shisha is more than a water pipe. It is a lifestyle.

Where do you see the shisha business in the Germany in 10 years? Are you expanding internationally?

Where shisha in Germany will be in ten years' time will be decided by politics. One thing is certain, we are part of it. Shisha is spreading from year to year, from country to country. For now, there is no end in sight. It is getting more complicated in Germany and other countries will follow.

If you could choose any company or business person in the world, which do you admire the most? And Why? Johannes: Reinhold Würth, he built up the screw trading company, Würth, into the international market leader in fastening and assembly technology with almost 80,000 employees. And Philip Eckhardt, because he is able to endure me. Together we have created a dynamic company that is still in the early stages of development. After all, we are only three years old”.

What goals do you have for your life business/project? I work very hard and 7 days a week. At the weekend, I catch up on things I didn't manage during the week and do marketing for different countries. In the long term, I'm looking forward to stepping on the gas even more, because there are still a few countries on the list that we still must conquer: Brazil and Russia by 2022,

What changes have you made to your business strategy during the last years? With increasing size, business strategy changes dynamically. In addition, we are always adapting to challenges, opportunities, local conditions and their risks.

What 3 things can you NOT live without? HOOKAIN, FOG YOUR LIFE, BLAZE, KOKA KOAL, KOKA FOIL.

What three skills are needed to be successful in business? The hunger to create something. The hunger to be the best. The third skill is a secret.

What has been your most satisfying moment in your business? I am still searching for that moment. One of my characteristics is that I am never satisfied. I don't look at what I have achieved, but what I still want to achieve.

Can you describe your typical day? How many hours a day do you usually work or think about work? Johannes: I get up at 8 a.m. every day and start working. The time and procedures are independent of where I am, as I work mostly from abroad, as I visit our foreign partners on site and observe the local market. I usually work 7 days a week from 8am to around midnight.

Considering all the individual parts of the shisha hose, bowl, stem, head, coal describe your perfect shisha set up? Using 3 Koka Koal Charcoal in an AppleOnTop on a Lit Lip phunnel bowl. I like Mamay Customs Asia Flower device for private enjoyment.

Where is the best venue in the world to enjoy a shisha? The best venue in the world to enjoy a shisha is definitely Andalucía, Spain .

HOOKAIN



www.hookain-tobacco.com/

ESCA works to promote shisha and to educate the public and political leaders about the tradition of shisha and those who use it.

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