

## 125 years of Miele – The story

**Almost 125 years ago to the day, on 1 July 1899, technician Carl Miele senior and businessman Reinhard Zinkann make their way to the local court to register their new company, Miele & Cie. They want to produce cream separators, although even then there is no shortage of such products. So they have to make a decision: Do they want to be cheaper than the others – or better? Miele and Zinkann declare "Immer Besser" (= forever better) to be the claim that will characterise the company in the long term. Today, Miele is one of Germany's most respected brands, with more than 22,000 employees in 49 countries and a turnover of € 4.96 bn. A journey through 125 years of quality and inventiveness - and the will to actively shape change.**

The company's origins trace back to Herzebrock in East Westphalia, specifically to a former grain mill where eleven employees work. Alongside the "Meteor" cream separator, they introduce the butter churn of the same name in 1900. In 1901, Carl Miele senior and Reinhard Zinkann unveil the first Miele washing machine. This wooden tub, larger than the butter churn, features a turnstile that has to be manually operated using a lever. By 1907, Miele relocates to Gütersloh, where increased manpower and a railway siding facilitate the delivery of growing quantities of wood. The company's order book exceeds all expectations.

What follows is a piece of German industrial history, marked by successes, pioneering achievements, but also mistakes and courageous course corrections – essential elements that sustain Miele's existence. It's also the story of two entrepreneurial families who continue to own Miele today. Their commitment lies in thinking and acting for the long term, financing investments from their own resources, and facing difficult decisions head-on.

### **Living social responsibility**

Miele demonstrates its social responsibility at an early stage – for example, by introducing one of the first company health insurance schemes in Germany in 1909 and their first company pension schemes in 1929. Miele has also set an example when it comes to environmental and climate protection, starting with the proverbial longevity of its appliances. Today, the focus is on the energy efficiency and recyclability of appliances as well as the use and generation of renewable energy at Miele sites. Miele is driving this forward with great vigour and has been honoured with the German Sustainability Award in 2014 and 2024.

### **Miele is the 'largest specialist factory'**

Miele proudly claims the title of "Germany's largest specialist factory" by 1914, with over 500 employees. They produce cream separators, butter churns, washing, wringing, and ironing machines. Although Miele briefly ventures into automobile production (building 143 cars),



they wisely abandon this industry in 1914. Decades later, the last surviving Miele car is discovered in a Norwegian barn and now resides in the company museum in Gütersloh.

In 1916, Miele establishes a second factory in Bielefeld, where they manufacture electric motors, bicycles, mopeds, and motorcycles. The 500,000th washing machine rolls out of the Gütersloh factory by the late 1920s. Bielefeld also sees the birth of Europe's first electric dishwasher in 1929. Miele expands its branch network within Germany and, in 1931, founds its first sales company outside the country – in Switzerland.

## **Generational change in difficult times**

The first generation change takes place at the end of the 1930s. So the founding sons, Carl Miele junior and Kurt Christian Zinkann, are responsible for guiding the company through the Second World War. This involves the production of munitions and the use of prisoners of war and forced labourers. The reconstruction of the factories after the war and the return to civilian production is also the responsibility of the second generation. The details of the company's role in the years 1933 to 1945 have been scientifically analysed and published as a book in 2023\*.

## **From agriculture to the home**

But how do cream separators, washing machines, bicycles and mopeds fit together? And then there are devices for preparing animal feed ('feed steamers'), ladders, handcarts, wooden huts and later kitchen furniture, hobs and ovens, other cooking utensils and much more?

In 1899, Carl Miele senior and Reinhard Zinkann set themselves the goal of making the hard daily work of farmers as easy as possible. However, agriculture and the agricultural machinery trade become less important as a sales channel – and Miele gradually concentrates on high-quality electrical appliances for the kitchen, laundry, and floor care. In 1924, laundry technology is added, followed by commercial dishwashing and cleaning, disinfection, and sterilization for medical facilities and laboratories (today's Professional Business Unit).

## **Dishwasher boom**

In the meantime, Miele ceases production of two-wheelers in Bielefeld in 1960. Inspired by the economic miracle, the company continued to concentrate on dishwashers with the same workforce, as these became increasingly popular in private kitchens. The company sells its

milking technology in the late 1980s and its kitchen furniture production in 2005. In return, built-in kitchen appliances becomes another of the company's mainstays.

The purchase of Cordes, a manufacturer of laundry-care appliances in Oelde, in 1987, helps in this respect. The plant later becomes a competence centre for cookers and ovens. Two years later, Miele takes over the cooking appliance manufacturer and long-time supplier Imperial, with plants in Bünde and Arnsberg. The 1990s see world firsts such as the first built-in steam cooker, the first pressureless steam cooker for domestic use and the first fully automatic built-in coffee machine.

## **From Gütersloh to the world**

These decisions are taken during the time of Rudolf Miele and Dr Peter Zinkann, the grandsons of the founders. Both join the company in the mid-1950s and are to help shape it for five decades before Rudolf Miele dies suddenly in mid-2004 and Peter Zinkann retire from Executive Board at the end of the year.

In contrast to his fathers and grandfathers, Rudolf Miele is the businessman – and responsible for the consistent internationalisation of marketing and sales. The first sales company outside Europe is founded in Australia in 1980, followed by South Africa (1982), the USA (1983) and Japan (1992). Peter Zinkann is responsible for development and production, including the company's first fully automatic washing machine, which goes into series production in 1958. In the 1960s, Miele washing machines and tumble dryers are equipped with electronic controls. The legendary Miele cutlery drawer for dishwashers follows in 1987 and the Miele honeycomb drum in 2001, both patented and therefore exclusive to Miele.

## **Executive Board reorganised**

In 2004, the last year in which the two congenial partners worked together, Miele has a turnover of € 2.2 bn, 15,100 employees, 11 production sites (including three outside Germany) and sales and service subsidiaries in 34 countries. At that time, the sons Dr Markus Miele and Dr Reinhard Zinkann are already members of the Executive Board. Due to the growing size and complexity of the company, however, the two now share responsibility equally with Executive Directors who are independent of the family. The following years are marked by the rapidly growing importance of digital marketing and smart appliance services. The new generation of appliances is also characterised by timeless elegance, exemplary performance and energy efficiency.

The revolutionary Dialog Oven, which combines electromagnetic waves with conventional cooking methods and continuously measures and adjusts the cooking status, celebrates its

world premiere at IFA 2017. In the same year, the company expands its strategic positioning with the founding of Miele Venture Capital GmbH and the acquisition of the Italian medical technology specialist Steelco Group. The acquisition of Düsseldorf-based barbecue specialist Otto Wilde Grillers in 2021 marks Miele's entry into the promising outdoor cooking segment.

## **For customers and the environment**

In the summer of 2024, Miele and its employees around the world are celebrating 125 years of quality and innovation in the service of customers and the environment. The eleven employees in Herzebrock, East Westphalia, have grown into a global team of more than 22,000 colleagues. The challenges facing the world in the early 2020s are enormous. They range from dealing with the pandemic to the economic consequences of the war in Ukraine, with a global slump in demand for household appliances and soaring costs in almost every sector.

## **Setting the course for growth**

The aim is to set the course for growth once more. To achieve this, Miele can build on its strong brand, a premium and quality standard unique in the industry, inspiring products and committed, creative teams in 49 countries – and on its ability to make the right, sometimes difficult, decisions in challenging times. The past 125 years have proven this time and again.

In the last financial year, the Miele Group generated sales of € 4.96 bn. Of the current 15 production plants, eight are located in Germany and one each in Austria, China, the Czech Republic, Romania and Poland. In addition, there are the two sites of the Italian medical technology specialist Steelco Group, which has been part of the Miele Group since 2017.

In order to further expand its promising business in North America, Miele is currently building its 16th plant in the US state of Alabama. Here, the production of large-volume ovens and cookers specially designed for this region will commence at the end of 2024. To further strengthen medical technology at Miele, a joint venture has been established with the Swiss industrial holding company Metall Zug AG, in which Miele holds 67% of the shares. The Gütersloh-based company will contribute the Steelco Group, while Metall Zug will contribute the former Steelco competitor Belimed. Miele is represented by its own sales and service companies in 49 countries with more than 200 brand stores.

The Executive Board of the Miele Group is made up of Olaf Bartsch (Finance & Administration), Dr Stefan Breit (Technology), Dr Axel Kniehl (Marketing & Sales), Dr Markus

Miele (Executive Director and Co -Proprietor), Rebecca Steinhage (Human Resources & Corporate Affairs) and Dr Reinhard Zinkann (Executive Director and Co -Proprietor).

\* Dr. Andrea H. Schneider-Braunberger, Miele im Nationalsozialismus, published at Siedler Verlag, Munich 2023, ISBN 978-3-8275-0188-2

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