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Europe

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Generating Change

MBL

Marques & Braga Lda:

an Interview with Victor Manuel Veloso Braga

by Kathleen Strickland

MIME recently interviewed Victor Braga about his growing company, MBL Lda, in Delães, Portugal.

Kathleen Strickland: Mr. Braga, please tell me about the history of your company.

Victor Braga: I was a graphic designer when I started my first company in 1985. At that time, I was 23 years old and had some different ideas about how to do business. Two years later, the company became a marking business.

Marking businesses then were old-fashioned and took a week to make one rubber stamp. I saw an opportunity for my team—we started making the stamps with 24-hour delivery, door-to-door. It was a revolutionary idea at that time. We were the first in Portugal to run a marking business this way.

We wanted to do our job faster every day—it was a time when businesses were trying to do everything faster. Customers wanted everything yesterday. We improved our production time to four hours—one hour for extremely urgent orders. Later, with a flash system, we offered five-minute service.

The adventure continues with our complete offset printing business. We have become a case study in growing a business.

When the company was 15 years old, I sold my interests in it and began my most recent project.

KS: What was this new project?

VB: I realised that the marking business stood alone and needed a full-service supplier, so in 2002 I founded the MBL company.

KS: What was your vision for this new company?

VB: My vision was to be different. I needed to have different products to supply to stamp makers. I started with a flash stamp system (the first in Portugal) imported from GoldPrint, a company based in Singapore. For traditional stamps, I work with Wagraf Label of Poland.



Victor Manuel Veloso Braga, owner of MBL.

KS: Where is your business located?

VB: As a warehouse, I am far from the public. My office is near my residence. We still have just a small office, only 100 metres square.

KS: How many employees do you have?

VB: Nowadays we have four people, all with backgrounds in the graphics business.

KS: What products do you offer?

VB: We can offer stamp makers everything they need, but our outstanding product is really the Flash Stamp Machine. The card-cutter machine also became very useful for the stamp makers who also made visit cards.

Self-inking stamps from Wagraf make up the biggest percentage of our sales.

KS: How is the market for marking products in your area?

VB: My selling area has grown beyond Portugal. We started marketing to Angola and Cabo Verde, and that business is still growing. MBL has been in business for four years, and this year we will double our sales for 2005, so it will be a good year.

KS: Is MBL diversifying into other products and services?

VB: I always try to provide new products, but the marking business is a very difficult market. It is hard to sell something new because no one wants to be the first to try it out. Many lost the opportunity to try the flash machine, and now the market is full of them.

KS: How do you market your products?

VB: I usually send out newsletters, but the principal way is to speak with the stamp makers. MBL is a well-known company in Portugal.

KS: What is your most successful marketing strategy?

VB: As I mentioned before, I always try to keep the client's satisfaction as the top consideration, and they do the rest for me, promoting my company to their colleagues.

KS: How are you growing your company now?

VB: We are going straight to the top, but I realise that Portugal is a county of 10 million inhabitants. Therefore, I opened a shop in Oporto city. It is a multi-service shop that provides graphic arts, rubber stamps and identification labels.

KS: How is MBL different from other companies?

VB: We are different because we are always studying the marketplace to see what business we can do.

KS: What is your business philosophy?

VB: Our products are tested, so we always know where our quality stands. If we do not approve the product, we will not put it on the market, so our clients trust this company. We always put our clients' needs first.

KS: How do you maintain your interest and enthusiasm for the business?

VB: To earn a new client is a victory. We have two strong labels in Portugal, and every time one stamp maker chooses a Wagraf self-inking stamp it is really a victory for us.

KS: In your opinion, what is the future of the marking and identification business in general?

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To earn a new client
is a victory.

VB: I think we have a great future in this business, but the stamp makers must control the prices. No one can survive lowering prices on their work. That will be the end of their business.

KS: What do you see in the future of MBL?

VB: As I mentioned, I started this multi-service company to shake up the market. It seems the marking business is sleeping, and this is the right time to bring out new ideas. I know it will be good for the future. With this company, I hear directly from the final customers what they think about MBL Marking Products, and I can also help my clients sell our products.

KS: What else would you like our readers to know about your company?

VB: If we are useful, we are on the right path.

Do not turn away from new products—try them and give them a chance. If you do, the big suppliers will help you more or risk losing you.

I would like to thank Eric Chua of GoldPrint, Agata from Wagraf, Esther of Amerkana, Marco Verkuijl and all of the people who believe in my project.

KS: Thank you very much for taking the time to speak to our *MIME* readers.

VB: I am grateful to be able to give this interview and hope someone will find it useful.

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