



**27.-29.9.2022  
NÜRNBERG**

## STORY

August 2022

### **A corporate family with a long tradition and a wealth of expertise**

**In its almost 100-year history, Prodinger has lived through and helped shape a number of transformations in the packaging industry. How is the family company responding to the current challenges?**

With a workforce of around 500 at several locations, Coburg-based packaging wholesaler Prodinger is one of the largest distributors of transport packaging in the German-speaking regions. Since 1925, the family company has been making a name for itself above all with its vendor-neutral advice. Its customers come from a wide range of industries and disciplines: After all, anyone selling or transporting a product needs to pack it appropriately so that it reaches the customer well-protected. "A reliable partnership with our customers, suppliers and employees forms the basis for long-term relationships and our sustainable growth," says Steffen Prodinger, summing up the company's philosophy.

Growing up as part of a family company, there was never any doubt in his mind that he would at some point take on a role in it. In the meantime, Steffen is the managing partner of the PRODINGER Group. He is at pains to stress that it is not about his own career or having a certain position but being able to make his contribution within the company, which he also describes as a "bunch of smart people with different jobs to do". Every member of staff does their part at their workplace and is an expert in their field.

One such expert is Matthias Koch, who joined the company in 2005 at the same time as Steffen Prodinger. "I immediately knew that I had found a company with a huge amount of passion for its products and that is characterised by team spirit," says Koch, recalling his decision at that time to become a trainee at Prodinger. Today, he is responsible for the company's sustainable packaging products, drawing on his long-standing experience in sales and his collaboration with the field sales force. "As a wholesaler we differ from many manufacturers. Our mission is to offer our customers various options so that they can then make an informed decision," says Koch

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of his responsibilities. Steffen Prodinge adds: “We advise our customers with the objective of finding a packaging solution to ensure that their products reach their own customers undamaged.” In this context, the aim is to find the ideal combination of functionality and price. Drawing on an extensive range of solutions, our consultants then realise these requirements to make efficient use of resources and energy.

### **Sustainability takes more than just a superficial look**

When it comes to sustainability, Koch has been seeing increasing demand since as far back as 2008, and this is reflected in the packaging supplier’s portfolio. According to Koch, the wholesale segment is therefore an important platform for driving the ‘transition in packaging’. A lot has been happening in recent years, especially when it comes to reducing packaging volume. The thickness of bags and containers has been substantially reduced, for example. “These changes have happened gradually and can only be properly grasped by looking back at the past,” says Koch.

Steffen Prodinge is also aware that there has been a greater focus on environmental responsibility, and that this will continue. Nevertheless, attention has been diverted away from this issue due to the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. “This shows that social perceptions may well be superficial and result in the simplification of requirements.” For example, paper is not automatically more environmentally friendly than plastic. “According to my understanding, replacing the thin plastic bags used in online retail with kraft paper bags with a view to reducing the carbon footprint is not really effective and a little bit simplistic,” says Prodinge, describing one example. However, as an expert in sustainable packaging, Matthias Koch knows that it is also important to consider the destination for the final product: “Although a paper bag might have a worse carbon footprint, if there are no recycling facilities for certain plastics in the destination country, then paper is certainly more sustainable in these circumstances.” However, there is a good recycling infrastructure in Germany, which would give polymer films the edge.

These general considerations absolutely can lead to trade-offs in terms of price, material, or carbon footprint and other environmental influences. This is why, according to Koch, individual advice is always necessary: “Similar projects can often have quite different goals that we need to meet.” Because Prodinge has been in business for a long time, its specialists can draw on a



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wide range of experience. “We have the advantage of not having to sell a specific product or material, so we always argue in the customer’s favour,” says the packaging consultant.

### **Complex issues call for competent advisors**

Koch assumes that in the next few years there will be an even greater focus on reducing energy consumption. This might happen due to more technically advanced machines but also as a result of higher recycling content in packaging. “Energy consumption can be reduced substantially by incorporating post-consumer recycled content (PCR) into packaging. But we still need to keep an eye on where the material comes from,” warns Koch. He therefore also expects that ensuring the traceability of PCR will still play a particularly important role. The made-for-recycling principle as the basis for the circular economy would also need to become widespread. In this context, Prodingler believes that its role as a vendor-neutral consultant is to support and educate customers. “The impartiality of our advice is evident, for example, whenever the corporate carbon footprint information for sustainability reports is examined by a third party and our data is confirmed,” says Matthias Koch.

Although at present, customers are particularly concerned by the availability of goods and raw materials, sustainable packaging solutions will again play a significant role at Prodingler’s stand at the forthcoming FACHPACK. “As far as we are concerned, FACHPACK is the biggest German fair for packaging. Thanks to its extensive range of different exhibitors and visitors, you get exposed to a wide variety of topics and ideas,” says Steffen Prodingler.

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