

IWA OutdoorClassics 2019

Nuremberg, 8 March 2019

Dark clouds, few bright spots

The 70th anniversary of the VDB (Association of German Gunsmiths and Gun Traders), which was founded in 1949, will play only a minor role at this year's IWA OutdoorClassics. The issues that the VDB has to deal with this year in particular are too wide-ranging and time-consuming, and in some cases are affecting its around 1,300 member companies to the extent of jeopardising their livelihoods. As a result, the firearms segment, which is strongly impacted by national and international legislation, is increasingly focusing on solidarity and networking within, but also beyond, its own sphere of interest, for example in the areas GDPR, electrical and electronic equipment act or packaging directives. In this context, the VDB operates as an intermediary to perform a coordinating role.

A brief overview of the past and coming months:

Sales figures are down compared with previous years. Customers are more cautious about purchasing, and prices in the used firearms market continue to stagnate at a very low level. When buying new firearms and equipment, customers nowadays are getting their information and comparing prices online. However, high-quality products like hunting and sports shooting firearms or optical sighting devices often require personal inspection and the kind of scrutiny that you simply cannot get from a text description or video, no matter how good they are. The specialist gun dealer's trump card is the availability of products that you can also actually handle in the shop. The ability to provide expert individual advice and ultimately, the personal customisation of the products to the purchaser then justify the slightly higher price in a specialist retail outlet compared with the anonymous, standardised environment of the internet.

Nevertheless, no gun dealer can afford to ignore the online segment, even if the firearms sector has traditionally taken a more reticent approach to it. Specialist retailers are gradually getting to grips with the digital transformation and are offering, in addition to their core "brick-and-mortar" shops, other sales outlets and contact channels, such as their own websites with online shop, other sales platforms (also offered by the VDB), online advertisements, the hunting catalogue sold by the VDB through member companies, and social media activities. Incidentally, the latter often don't involve the major players like Facebook or Google – even if offering weapons for sale is legal, they cannot be actively marketed under the terms and conditions of these platforms controlled from the USA.

From the point of view of the consumer, the gun dealer has to offer added value, whether this takes the form of expert zeroing of the hunting gun with suitable ammunition, providing contacts to local hunting groups or information on archery. In future, the specialist retailer will also have to provide significantly more information in addition to the products, but this gives both brick-and-mortar stores and online retail outlets the same opportunity to become the new "marketplace" for professional dialogue and as a result a centre of expertise as well.

PRESS RELEASE



To keep up with the latest developments and be prepared in particular for the many legislative obligations to be met, the VDB provides its members with the skills they need through training and professional development, not just in issues specific to the industry but for example in areas like data privacy, the packaging act or the electrical and electronic equipment act.

But there's an even worse threat to come: with the current draft of an amendment to the German Weapons Act, which is actually intended to transpose the anti-terror EU Weapons Directive into national law, is hanging a Damocles sword over the industry. In their own written statements, the VDB and the German Federal Guild of Gunsmiths have notified the Ministry of the Interior of their most important criticisms of the planned law. Many of its requirements seem excessive and are associated with numerous bureaucratic hurdles and far higher investment costs than outlined in the draft.

Someone who in any case has little room to manoeuvre due to weapons-related legislation, and who perhaps for reasons of age cannot find a successor for their company, will readily consider giving up their business. The need to invest in an expensive computer system because as of this year, all movements of firearms like sales, purchases and repairs need to be notified electronically via the National Weapons Register, and the associated high bureaucratic burden of up to 30 minutes additional work per entry, may accelerate such a decision, all the more so as the greater security given as the reason for tightening up the legislation is not discernible. This is why the VDB is also going to have to provide a lot of advice and support to concerned members, especially those with smaller businesses, at its IWA stand. In this context, another important job for the VDB is to work on its own administrative solution, the "NWR-Waffenbuch" firearms register, which simplifies communication between gunsmith or firearms dealers and the reporting office of the National Weapons Register.

ABOUT THE VDB

The Association of German Gunsmiths and Gun Traders (VDB), which is based in Marburg, is the professional association and lobbying group representing more than 1,300 member companies from the sector. The market volume for civilian hunting and sports firearms in Germany is around 700 million euros. Some 30,000 people are employed in the sector.

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