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INTERVIEW



Udo Hoffmann in Beijing - a real "Old China Hand".

"A passion for music"

Udo Hoffmann is a real "Old China Hand". For twenty years, this Swabian native (born in Nürtingen) has been living in Beijing. And he's been indulging ever since – sometimes more and sometimes less intensively – in his greatest passion: music.

You organize music festivals in China and are something of an ambassador of pop music. Why China?

First of all, because I studied Sinology. But for me China is also a huge playing field where I can try out a lot. When I came to China in 1999, the upcoming rock scene interested me tremendously.

Has the Chinese music changed since?

Enormously! Twenty years ago rock music was seen as something unhealthy. Nothing was permitted. In the middle of the Nineties, I organized a jazz festival together with the [Goethe Institute](#), which featured mainly rock music. That would draw less attention and we simply bypassed all the regulations that way. The Chinese youth simply took in everything that came from the West. Today, you can sense a wish to find one's own roots. There is good experimental music here.

In June you organized a big festival with German bands during the German-Chinese Promenade which was part of the event "Germany and China – moving ahead together" taking place in Shenyang. Was that difficult?

Such big festivals with some 20,000 spectators per day are still difficult here. There is simply a lack of experience, particularly by the police, which tends to overreact at times.

Is China the music market of the future?

Yes. China has roughly 250 cities with more than 1 million inhabitants. That's a huge audience and it's very interested in world culture. The European music industry has a lot to offer here, and German musicians should show their variety in China. I am always amazed how many people in the audience can sing along German song texts. At the same time, the Chinese want to develop something of their own. In a few years, we will be able to learn from the Chinese, and the media in Germany should pay more attention to that.

You've announced that you want to take it a bit slower from now on ...

Something like that event in Shenyang is very stressful. I'd love to spend some time in a monastery, but I would probably end up organizing a music festival there instead. So first I'm looking forward to the Promenade in Wuhan soon.



Gina Hardebeck,
Director China, Storymaker

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THE WORLD OF PR AND MEDIA

How to get the Chinese media to notice German medium-sized companies

Medium-sized companies — also known as the *Mittelstand* — are the backbone of the German economy. They deliver around 80%-90% of German GDP and create most of the country's jobs. Highly specialized and innovative, many of these companies have evolved from "hidden champions" to well-known brands and world leaders in their respective fields.

So how do German Mittelstand companies fare in China? And what's the best way to get their name out there in market that is 26 times bigger than Germany? Mr. Ding Laifeng, deputy editor-in-chief of [International PR Magazine](#), offered some clues during the 3rd Sino-German Communication Forum held at the end of July in Beijing. "Any news with social value and

a controversial subject is attractive to Chinese media. Or, if a company can find a way to effectively bundle its news together with a famous person, that will also increase the interest of Chinese media.”

Yet that’s easier said than done. Medium-sized companies face many challenges during their first few years in China, from finding well-educated employees and reliable partners to figuring out the right sales strategy in a highly competitive market. And let there be no doubt: the costs for a promotional campaign, even with a minor Chinese VIP, are seldom affordable.

But companies can still build their reputation step by step, for example by inviting Chinese journalists to one-on-one talks or press conferences during trade fairs where they are present. “Don’t forget to invest some time in finding the right journalists or editors for your business; otherwise all efforts will be fruitless”, Ding added.

After Ding’s speech, the 35 participants of the forum shared their own experiences in a lively and long discussion. “Most German companies are not that knowledgeable about China,” opined one participant. “An effective way to solve this problem is through localization. Try to find a person who knows China well and understands its media landscape and markets. That person could be very useful to a company.” Another added, “First of all, you have find out what the Chinese demand in the corresponding products areas. It’s not much different than when you’re hungry: you will look for something to eat. But if you are full, you won’t eat anymore, even if it’s the most delicious food in the world. So look what whets peoples’ appetite in China – regardless of whether it’s B2C or B2B products.”



Wang Rongli,
Account Executive, Storymaker Representative Office, Beijing

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Sweet temptation



Left: Carefully, the German specialty is created according to traditional recipes

Right: Admirable - Typical black forest uniforms and musical instruments

Pictures: „Deutschland und China – Gemeinsam in Bewegung“ (Jiang Ziwei)

The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. That’s true in China as well and is useful to create leads for PR campaigns. Lately, the legendary Black Forest Cake won the hearts of the people of the Northern Chinese metropolis Shenyang with the help of a small media event.

“The secret to this cake is the mix of the sourness from the cherries, the sweetness of the whipped cream, the bitterness of the chocolate, and the juiciness of the cherry liquor,” explained Zhang Shicheng to curious journalists while he decorated the cake. During the event, “Germany and China – Moving Ahead Together,” this baker of a German bakery in Nanjing not only baked for the visitors of the German-Chinese Promenade in Shenyang, but also represented the partner state Baden-Württemberg in Germany. The baking of the cake was part of this small media event, during which the baker also introduced the region of its origin — the Black Forest — while preparing this sweet-tooth specialty.

The local journalists picked up on the event and reported on the Black Forest Cake, Baden-Württemberg and the German-Chinese history of the baker who learned his trade in Nanjing and in the village of [Baiersbronn](#), the latter which is known far and wide for its top restaurants.



Simone Anders,
Account Manager Storymaker

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The ration coupons are back

Memories of the days when people had to buy things with ration coupons might sound bizarre to today's teenagers, but it's a dreadful reminder of a needy time that almost every Chinese over 35 years old would rather not recall. After fading from the memory of the average Chinese, the coupon is now making a comeback. Yet it has taken on a new visage: today's new coupons aim to get people to spend.

Heeding the central government's domestic consumption stimulus, [Nanjing](#), the provincial capital of [Jiangsu Province](#), was the first to give out free tourism coupons worth 20 million yuan (2.1 million EUR) in February. This inspired another dozen provincial and city governments to follow suit. Given the ongoing economic downturn, the coupon promotion was an instant hit for both the general public and the media. After all, both are suffering a shortage — the former from a shortage of income, the latter from a shortage news stories.

People poured in to Nanjing to snatch up the new stimulus coupons. Normally used as entrance tickets e.g. for theater, these coupons are expected to encourage even more people to boost their consumption, since the holders of the coupons can take advantage of certain discounts. Apart from contributing to more domestic consumption, provincial governments are also issuing stimulus coupons as a marketing tool, for example to increase the awareness of their touristic attractions of their city and to promote their brand. Take the city of [Hanzhou](#) in [Zhejiang Province](#). This city's ambitious decision to issue coupons to people living outside the province caused so much public zeal that the original distribution plan in Beijing on March 7 and 8 had to be canceled for safety reasons.

Government officials seemed confident about the effectiveness of issuing coupons as long as they generated economic revenue or increased public awareness which would bring long-term benefits. In an interview with the [Beijing News](#), Chen Weimin, deputy director of the publicity department of Hangzhou Tourism Committee, said it is estimated that 40% of the coupons will lead to around 1 million visits to the city, which could generate over 1 billion yuan of income. "Our goal to promote tourism would be achieved even if people who have received the coupon don't come," he said.



Tan Rui,
Account Executive, Storymaker Representative Office, Beijing

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Carl Zeiss assigns PR for lens division to Storymaker

The business division camera lenses at Carl Zeiss AG, located in Oberkochen, Germany, will in the future do their PR business with Storymaker. The agency prevailed in a two stage pitch and from now on supports the business division with the conception of PR campaigns both for corporate publishing as well as expert communication for print and online media.

All the world knows that Carl Zeiss manufactures excellent lenses. Be it at the landing of the moon or when shooting "Lord of the Rings" – ZEISS lenses have steeped in history with their services. For the latest Nokia Mobile Devices or for industrial scenarios such as crashtests, the pin sharp and lightning-fast lenses from Oberkochen are also sought.

“Storymaker convinced us by realizing their storytelling-approach for every discipline. Also, the agency approaches new ranges of topics with great commitment and creativity,” says Helmut Heier, Head of Marketing and Sales at Carl Zeiss business division photo lenses. „The agency’s expertise with online and social media PR will play a big role for us, too.”

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GERMAN-CHINESE COMMUNITY

Do they know you are a German company?

Although China’s economy is currently experiencing a year-on-year slowdown, it is still growing compared with many other countries, which face a contraction of GDP. For this reason, German companies continue to be interested in either expanding in the Chinese market or building their existing presence.

In the current crisis, companies are reluctant to allocate resources for branding and marketing; however, entering the Chinese market still requires them to come up with a sound strategy. Invariably, the process starts by picking the right Chinese name, creating a brochure in Chinese and coming up with an image that appeals to their Chinese target groups – for example at trade fairs. In this regard, German companies already have an advantage since German people, products and services enjoy a very positive image in China. The general perception of German products is that they are made of high quality with good, reliable performance. This, in turn, helps companies to justify asking a price premium.

It is therefore not surprising that in discussions with tenants of the [German Centre Beijing](#), they repeatedly emphasize the benefits of having an office at the German Centre. It provides them with an identity of being German in China.

Interestingly, in particular Chinese nationals working for German companies are sensitive to this issue. Having a presence at the German Centre creates visibility and builds a company’s credibility. However, this can only represent a first step for a successful market entry into China. Developing a sustainable and targeted network of business partners as well as drafting a compelling marketing strategy is the second key step.



Hanna Böhme,
Managing Director, German Centre for Industry and Trade Beijing Co. Ltd

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Taking the first steps in China

Bavaria, North Rhine-Westphalia und Baden-Württemberg all have their own offices in China. Their purpose is to lend help to companies from their respective state that are just starting up a business in China, and to help them in promoting their business.

In particular [„Baden-Württemberg-International“](#) offers a unique service: its company pool. „The first steps in China are always the hardest,” says Julia Güsten, director of the BW-I in partner province Nanjing for more than 10 years. BW-I not only offers new companies a list of tried-and-tested business partners, but also acts as a matchmaker itself. In addition, Baden-Württemberg has established a common office space that newcomers can share when they’re just starting out. It has everything: desks, technical infrastructure and staff. It also has German and Chinese-speaking staff — engineers, marketing professionals, secretaries, you name it — which German companies can „rent”. Companies that only need part-time staff can hire them from another firm. Every company pays a membership fee, which gives it the right to use certain services. It’s a practical model that has been well received. Currently, 18 small to medium-sized companies from Baden-Württemberg are sharing office space at BW-I.

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