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**“CONTINUITY IS  
REQUIRED IN A  
CRISIS”**

Birgit Huber, Head of Beauty  
Care Department, IKW

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# CONTINUITY IN TIMES OF CRISIS

**Challenges** | Like the entire cosmetics industry, the IKW, short for the body care and detergent industry association, has been severely affected by the effects of the pandemic in the past few months. We talked to Birgit Huber about changes and perspectives.



► **Birgit Huber,**  
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## **How long have you been at IKW and what still inspires you?**

Since I have always been enthusiastic about cosmetics, I started working as a scientific assistant at IKW immediately after studying food technology. That was more than 30 years ago. And even today, I am still enthusiastic about the versatility of my tasks. I'm a member of various scientific and technical working groups, such as the Cosmetics Commission at the Federal Institute for Risk Assessment, and in European committees, such as in the board of Cosmetics Europe, the European umbrella organisation for cosmetics. It is one of my tasks to answer all questions to inform and

advise regarding cosmetics competently. The fact that I can actively shape processes inspires me every day.

## **How did IKW react to the challenges of the pandemic? How did the association support cosmetics companies during the pandemic?**

During the pandemic, the IKW core competencies were particularly in demand. As a valued contact and interface between authorities, industry, consumers, and the media, IKW reacted very quickly to the new challenges. For example, when disinfectants were in short supply at the beginning of the pandemic, IKW successfully lobbied the

essential and could therefore continue to produce during the lockdown.

#### **How has the cosmetic and beauty care product market changed because of the pandemic?**

The pandemic has hit the cosmetics and beauty care market more in some categories than in others. **The greatest impact can certainly be traced back to the fact that people had to reduce their social contacts and increasingly worked from home.** This eliminated many occasions for which one would put on make-up, hair style or apply perfume. This is reflected in the sales figures for the product categories that lost significantly in 2020, such as decorative cosmetics and women's and men's fragrances. In addition, there is the closure of shops, such as perfumeries, and the associated changes in shopping habits. Due to short-time work, some consumers also have less money available.

#### **Are there also winners in this sector? If so, how did they benefit?**

Yes, there are also products that were particularly in demand due to their performance during the pandemic: soaps and syndets, for example. As regular and careful hand hygiene is one of the effective methods in the fight against the Coronavirus, this category recorded a significant increase of 77% last year. Linked to this, there is another winner: Since people used more soaps and disinfection products, the need for hand cream also increased. We know from a survey, conducted by Statista on behalf of IKW, that **hand cream has become one of the most popular products in the pandemic.** Furthermore, manufacturers report that products highlighting the eyes achieved a significant plus. This is very understandable since Mascara and eyebrow products are perfectly suited to give your face more character and expression despite the face masks.

#### **What role have cosmetics and beauty routines played for consumers since the beginning of the pandemic?**

Even if beauty routines have changed during the pandemic and people are using certain products less – personal care and **cosmetics are still very important in the everyday life** of German consumers and contribute to their well-being. This was confirmed by 93% of respondents in a survey conducted by Statista during the pandemic. We decided very early last year to carry out this survey because we wanted to know more about people's beauty routines and if they have changed during the pandemic. The results showed very clearly that **beauty products and beauty routines help to structure everyday life**, particularly in times of uncertainty. 61% of the respondents in the survey also say that their appearance is just as important to them as it was before. And 77% say they spend as much time in the bathroom as they did before.

#### **How optimistically does the cosmetics industry see the year 2021?**

The pandemic is creating unprecedented challenges for companies – starting with difficulties in sourcing raw materials, production under difficult conditions, through to closed shops and reduced contacts. As it stands, many of these challenges will continue for some time. Despite all this: **A strong plus of the cosmetics industry is that the companies are very innovative and creative.** The companies always strive to meet customer's needs and demands, for example by developing new technologies and highly effective ingredients. At the same time, they react extremely quickly to trends. Reduced customer communication due to closed stores? I am sure, we will see a lot more apps and online-services making knowledge about products, ingredients, and routines more easily available in the near future. **For 2021, we see the mood among the IKW member companies as cautiously optimistic.** ▶

authorities and ministries responsible in Germany to obtain a broader exemption so that sufficient quantities of disinfectants could also be made available to private consumers in a short time. As a committed industry association, we also stood by associated sectors in a spirit of partnership and, among other things, supported hairdressers with a communication offensive during the reopening after the first lockdown.

**Despite all the complexity, continuity is also required in a crisis.** Despite the massive restrictions on personal contact, the association efficiently continued established dialogues with stakeholders and the media and was always available with reliable information about the industry's performance.

We were also a constant companion for our member companies when it came to assistance with questions about the pandemic, e.g. whether our industry was



The reduction in social contact and the frequent relocation of professional life to the home office has slumped sales in many areas of the cosmetics industry.



But there are also winners: The sale of hand care products has increased significantly in recent months.

**In addition to the pandemic, what challenges will the cosmetics industry have to face soon? What are the chances?**

One of the important issues for the cosmetics industry continues to be the influence of digitalisation on all business processes. The pandemic has once again accelerated this development and showed where there is still a need to catch up. **Internet and social media are the places where today's consumers inform themselves, communicate with each other and buy their products – without online shopping almost nothing would have been possible in the last few months.** And this is of course reflected in the growth figures of e-commerce. Even if consumers long to go back to the shops, the share of e-commerce will remain high in the post-pandemic period. So, **if you want to be close to the customer, you must invest in the online shopping experience, in online communication with consumers and in the use of apps as digital service supplements to products.**

**What influence does the pandemic have on developments around sustainability?**

Value-oriented action and environmentally sound business practices are not new guiding principles for industry, but they have taken on a new significance because of the pandemic. **The pandemic acts as a catalyst**

**in this context:** people are becoming aware that living conditions as we enjoy them are not guaranteed. Due to their proximity to consumers, cosmetics manufacturers are particularly challenged to meet social demands and show a sense of responsibility, for example through new technologies, resource-saving productions, sustainable packaging, or the selection of ingredients. As active co-creators of change, many cosmetics companies are already pursuing ambitious sustainability programmes and are exploring new ways to reduce the ecological footprint of their products. This development will continue to strengthen.

**What tasks does the IKW see in the coming years?**

The challenges for our member companies are also the challenges by which our tasks are measured. The demands for safety, effectiveness and sustainability of products will remain very high. At the same time, changing economic conditions, such as those triggered by trade conflicts, are creating more uncertainties. In addition, there are changes in legal regulations that can have an impact on production processes. Or sudden global events, such as the pandemic now, for which we must be prepared.

Covid-19 is an enormous effort for all of us. But **it has also shown us that we can withstand such a stressful**

**test based on our expertise, a high degree of flexibility and commitment.** In an increasingly complex world, the role of IKW as a reliable scientific authority for companies and the public will continue to gain in importance.

**To what extent have the tasks of IKW changed because of globalisation and how will they continue to change in the near future?**

Most of our member companies are very active internationally. The original aim of the association to help member companies seize their opportunities in the “big European market” has long since been expanded to include other markets around the world. And this means that the horizon of our activities has also expanded. IKW supports its members – many of whom are small and medium-sized enterprises – through a variety of measures to open up foreign markets. These include, for example, providing market analyses, organising trade fairs abroad, accompanying business initiation trips or issuing certificates of free sale. Even though the possibilities in these areas are currently very limited, **IKW will continue to support its members in achieving growth abroad** as well. But soon, the top priority for everyone is that the economy picks up speed again and society returns to its usual normality. □