

A SENSE OF SELF

Swiss business culture emphasises precision, accuracy, and above all, quality. Three Swiss companies in China explain how this strong sense of identity has supported their development and achievements here.



sim (selective international management)



sim (selective international management) Co. Ltd. is a Shanghai-based Swiss consulting company, providing support to foreign and domestic companies mainly doing business in or with China. The company's strength lies in managing local operations and projects; initiating, implementing and operating ventures successfully with and for their clients.

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Shanghai General Manager of sim, Michael Lehmann explains how the Swiss approach translates across global markets.



sim is a Swiss company, but has offices in Shanghai and Beijing as well as in Switzerland, Germany, and Finland. How has the company developed its ability to respond to clients' localised needs in a specific business environment?

ML: There are strengths that have value in every market. Our strengths are typically Swiss – we emphasise the importance of reliability, quality and attention to detail for our services and products – but that is good for customers anywhere, not only in Switzerland.

In China, for companies like us, the goal is to bring the same strengths to another market. The China market is of course different from the Swiss market, but a sincere ambition to achieve quality and reliability is still a great driving force. Our standards are high, and that's what helps us to find a way to satisfy the clients in each market be it in Asia or Europe.

What are the principle challenges faced by your clients in Shanghai, and how do you help them to overcome those challenges?

ML: For international companies, ourselves included, the challenge is to work out what we need to change in order to adapt successfully, and, at the same time, what we need to keep to maintain our focus and identity. Without experience, it can be hard to foresee how much change or what kind of change will work; that's something we can help our clients to understand and implement.

We're very clear about what matters to us – quality is the key – and that is what we have to hold on to, to a certain extent, even as we adapt to a new market. I am convinced that Swiss companies all know that this is a core value at the heart of our corporate culture and character, and a great asset wherever we do business.

JANSEN

JANSEN JANSSEN was established in 1923 as an independent Swiss company, and has been developing and producing steel profile systems for more than 50 years. Today, JANSSEN is the market leader in Europe. The high level of investment in employee training and a modern infrastructure as well as the proximity to the customers provide the basis for innovative products and solutions at competitive prices. In 2008, JANSSEN established a Competence Center in Shanghai to provide more high-quality services in China.

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Lenzlinger Access Floors

LS Lenzlinger Access Floors Lenzlinger Access Floors, a Swiss-based manufacturer, provides durable and flexible access to underfloor installation, suitable for office areas, data centres and other technical facilities. Lenzlinger products meet highest quality standards and are suitable for various applications, and the company offers off-the-shelves installations as well as customised solutions and excellent consultancy.

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Christoph Gressbach, Managing Director JANSSEN Asia, sees Swiss characteristics at the heart of their success.



What are the strengths that you associate with a Swiss company in China?

CG: There is a certain stereotype that comes with the 'Swiss' label. 'Swiss' means high quality, clean, precise, and high-tech – all the characteristics you'd bring up if you were describing an excellent Swiss watch.

On this occasion, the stereotype is true, in watch making, yes, but in other industries too. It's important to understand that if you want to understand Swiss success in business overseas. For example, in construction, Switzerland produces business values and practices that focus on the details and lasting results, just like the clichéd Swiss watchmaker. That's becoming more widely known in China, where Europe as a whole has a well-justified, much respected reputation in this sector, even in comparison with other developed economies and the US market, which is often held up as a beacon in China where US-style LEED certifications and the like are highly prized.

How are these strengths illustrated by your achievements and in terms of your branding in this market?

CG: We've taken on some great projects in China, including the National Stadium in Beijing for the Olympics in 2008, office buildings and fabrication plants for various large car manufacturers, government buildings and embassies in Beijing as well in historical buildings in Shanghai, museums across the country and prestigious private housing. The quality results speak for themselves.

The fact that we were asked to be involved also shows how these strengths support our reputation and branding. I think that's a particularly remarkable achievement because it shows that these clients fully understand what we are offering; not everyone embraces the idea of investing in quality in this market, though that's starting to change with experience. It takes time for clients to fully appreciate the long-term return on their investment.

Chief Representative at Lenzlinger Access Floor's Shanghai office, Heinz D'Arzié, is very aware of their unique selling points as a Swiss business.



How does this market perceive Swiss strengths in business?

HD: The first thing that comes up, in my experience, is the value of the Swiss approach, Swiss expertise and Swiss standards.

However, the way that the market perceives this value is steadily changing. I have seen some people equating Swiss value with expense, plain and simple; now they're starting to better appreciate why our products and services have great worth.

There is a growing appreciation of what our clients receive for their money – assured quality in products and service; there are lots of organisations who have had positive experiences after they took the decision to invest, and plenty of others who did not want to make that investment have come to regret the cheap option, too late.

There's also more demand for long-term solutions in the market today, and that's helping the progression of this growing appreciation. Often in China, I've found that clients were not sure that they really wanted a long-term solution – so they would pay less, for something that simply wouldn't last very long. A developing economy and the prospect of long term growth is making better quality, lasting solutions more useful, as more companies and their projects are here to stay.

How important is your Swiss identity as a company in China?

HD: It's very important, this dedication to quality and reliability, in services and products. Those are the ideals that keep us focussed on creating something valuable for the client, without cutting corners, without any kind of compromise.

We believe that it's these values and characteristics that make us different from the rest. That Swiss identity opens doors for us.