

UPSTATE

BUSINESS

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Balancing Act

While restaurants are thriving downtown, Greenville hopes to bring more retail to Main Street

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UNITING NATIONS

► With CSJ & Co., former BMW exec Clemens Schmitz-Justen helps companies communicate internationally



Photo S by Greg Beckner

Clemens Schmitz-Justen, formerly with BMW, now runs his own company, CSJ Schmitz-Justen & Company.

From head of manufacturing at Greer's BMW production facility to international programs at Clemson University and now his own company, CSJ & Co., Clemens Schmitz-Justen is maintaining international relations in the Upstate.

By April A. Morris | staff

How did you come to the Upstate?

I was with BMW for almost 18 years and came to Greenville in 1993 with the opening of the plant. I became president of BMW Manufacturing in 2004 and brought the family here, staying in that role until 2007. Instead of being transferred to another facility by the company, my family basically went on strike and said, "We're not done here yet." Greenville is a great place to live, so that's why we stayed here. I worked with Clemson University on their international programs until we were ready to set up CSJ & Co.

What does CSJ & Co. do?

I founded the company in 2009 and work in three different capacities. I serve on various boards of family-owned companies in the U.S., Germany and Mexico. We also do strategic consulting, for example, for German companies looking to set up in the U.S. They need someone who can speak their language. We also help American businesses going to Germany to set up acquisitions and due diligence – they also want somebody in Germany who they can talk to. Executive search is also a component of our work. >>

CSJ SCHMITZ-JUSTEN & COMPANY
Executive and Strategic Consulting Group



» How do you balance working between the U.S. and Europe?

I travel a good bit and I actually have an American partner, Frank Linden, in Stuttgart, Germany. He speaks to all the German business-people locally and has that kind of network and I do the same here. We also do many transatlantic projects.

Is what you do at CSJ & Co. similar to your work with BMW or Clemson?

Not at all. Before working with BMW, I was a consultant. What counts now is my experience as a manager of a sizeable outfit and international tradition. I've worked in the U.S., South Africa and Germany before coming here.

What do you enjoy most about your new endeavor?

The fascinating thing about consulting is that you deal with such a wonderful diversity of people, styles, cultures and enterprises. I totally enjoy this type of diversity in my work.

How was the experience of launching CSJ & Co.?

It's fascinating to do this in America as a guest of the country, as a foreign investor. I believe that convincing people that you are a relevant partner is easier in America than it is in Europe where things are more regulated, confined and categorized.

What's a surprising facet of your work?

Being an intercultural coach is part of my job, too. Just because people are able to speak the same language doesn't mean that they leave the conversation with the same images in their heads. There are stereotypes and they simply point out the difference: Germans think that Americans are frivolous and Americans think Germans are boring – but there is a reason for this. German culture is a very retrospective culture and they believe it's important to look back at what you have accomplished. To Americans, it's important to be on a mission,

“We stayed in Greenville because it's such a welcoming community and what has happened here in the 19 years since I've been here has been outstanding.”

to have a new project. Awareness of these differences is the first tool to overcome difficulties.

The Americans have to learn that there are other places in Germany for good food than just the Hofbrauhaus, and the Germans have to learn that shrimp and grits is not dangerous – depending on where you go, they can be somewhat spicy, and that's definitely not part of the German diet.

How is your schedule different from factory or academic life?

I don't have a lot of free time as this is a new career for me and I love what I do. When you do what you like, you don't sense the wear that it takes. Here, when I do business with German clients, I do it at 4 a.m. if need be – to be available before lunchtime for them. Then I can walk the dog before I do local projects; it's a magic degree of freedom.

Is there anything you miss from the BMW plant?

The humming of the machinery behind the wall. The humming behind the wall indicates the pulse of the factory. By the sound you can tell if they are running smoothly or if they are out of synch.

Are you here to stay?

We stayed in Greenville because it's such a welcoming community and what has happened here in the 19 years since I've been here has been outstanding. We have another home in Germany, but it is amazing how you can really become part of a community and feel at home in two places. The real question is where our two sons are going to settle.

How do you spend your free time?

Spending time with the family is what I like. Being part of seeing them (my sons) become more of who they are and who they have always been, but more sharply focused, is a wonderful experience.

timeline

1993:
Came to Greenville for construction of BMW plant

2004:
Became president of BMW Manufacturing in the U.S.

2007:
Worked with Clemson University on its international program

2009:
Formed CSJ Schmitz-Justen & Company LLC

