

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL SONNER, GENERAL SALES MANAGER AT HOT

## “The market is going to need brands in the future.”

**EXCLUSIVE** *Michael Sonner has been active for years in the erotic trade, and this experience will certainly come in handy at his new job: general sales manager at HOT Productions & Vertriebs GmbH. After all, he knows the needs and wishes of the trade perfectly well. We asked him about his new duties, the strong points of his new employer and the significance of brands in the erotic realm.*



**Michael Sonner, general sales manager at HOT Productions & Vertriebs GmbH**

*First of all, how long have you been working in the erotic industry, and how did you get involved in this market? What have been doing in this market before, and what did you do professionally before you got into the erotic business?*

**Michael Sonner:** I have been in this industry since 1994, and before that, I was managing director of a chain of jeweller's shops. Until 2009, I worked as managing director for Beate Uhse Retailing GmbH and Fun Center GmbH. After that I went to Munich and got into business for myself.

*And how did you get to work for HOT Productions & Vertriebs GmbH?*

**Michael Sonner:** During my time at Beate Uhse, we and HOT had a very close and very successful business relationship. Our ideas of successful distribution strategies for the erotic market were very similar. So, when time came, the idea of working for them was rather logical.

*Could you tell us what exactly your duties at HOT are?*

**Michael Sonner:** I am in charge of wholesaler support, and also of expanding our distribution network all over the world. Then, there's also new products (new product lines).

*What, would you say, are the strong points of HOT? What convinced you to join the company as general sales manager?*

**Michael Sonner:** The HOT brand has been established in the erotic retail market for many years. All over the world, brand products are on the rise. And the developing markets are very interested in established brands. HOT can cater to this demand, and they are also in a position to do business all over the globe.

*Often times, people follow a vision when they take on a new task or new challenges. What is your vision? What are the expectations and wishes you have going into this new job?*

**Michael Sonner:** In order to keep a brand successful, the consumer has to be aware of your products. And the products have to be readily available. The best advertisement campaign won't do you any good if the consumer can't find the product in the store. My goal is to establish the HOT products internationally and to make them available wherever there is demand for them.

*How many of the experiences you've made during your time in the erotic industry can you use for this new job?*

**Michael Sonner:** As a matter of fact, pretty much all of them. Ultimately, it is the consumer who decides whether a



London - Miami - Tokyo

product is a success or not, and that fact needs to be on our minds whenever we go to work on a project.

*You worked in the retail segment, so you are well aware of the worries and troubles and needs of the trade. Will you try to foster the communication with the trade and to increase the support of the retailers with sales-promoting materials?*

**Michael Sonner:** Of course, we are going to cater to the needs of the trade, and we will be there to support them when the retailers need help with product placement, product presentation, or training courses for their sales staff.

*Now let's talk about the products you will be distributing from now on. What makes the HOT products unique in your opinion? Why should every retailer have them on his shelves?*

**Michael Sonner:** As I already stated before, the market is going to need brands in the future. We already have two very successful product lines, HOT and Shiatsu, and in September we will add a new line to our range.

*What can you tell us about the HOT product line (size, products, quality, price, etc.)? Will you add new products in 2012?*



## THE GARDEN OF LOVE

**Michael Sonner:** Our products are certified and can be sold all over the world. This year, there will be three new products in both, the HOT and the Shiatsu range, and in September, we will launch the first 26 products of our new line.

**Which consumer group do the HOT products cater to?**

**Michael Sonner:** We want to appeal to the entire erotic market. Due to our product design, we also reach consumers whose only interest in erotic products is usually erotic wellness.

**For a brand to be successful, people need to know about it – is this task more difficult when you deal with erotic products instead of mainstream products?**

**Michael Sonner:** Usually, the problem with erotic products is not to create awareness for them, but to have them available wherever someone is looking for them. The consumer wants to get his product quickly. But that should become easier in the future as the online business is becoming more and more important.

**Talking about channels of distribution: HOT works with distributors and wholesalers. Will you continue to take this approach or are there plans for a new strategy?**

**Michael Sonner:** We will continue to distribute our products via wholesalers. There are markets, however, where we do not have distribution partners right now, and there are those markets that are

structured differently, and of course, we will think about ways to get our products to the people in these countries.

**Last, but not least: How will the market develop? The segment HOT and its products call their home is densely populated with producers, and it is getting more and more crowded due to developments such as own brands or private labelling products. What makes you so sure that HOT will be able to stand its ground in this market situation?**

**Michael Sonner:** Private labelling has not been very successful in the erotic market, and for a reason. It makes no sense for this market. The consumers prefer to buy well-known brands instead of no-name products. We will continue to push the HOT brand and increase awareness for it all over the world, and we expect that the market position of the HOT brand will continue to improve over the course of the next years. **e**