

## Saarioinen Eesti (Mamma & Let's Go)

### Turning the unprofitable food industry into a working business

In autumn 2009 Saarioinen Eesti OÜ established the newest and most modern ready-to-eat food factory in the Baltics in Rapla, which produced traditional portion-packed steaks, soups and salads under the Mamma brand. The timing was bad, because due to the economic crisis, the purchasing power of consumers decreased and the company did not make any profit in the following years. The Finnish owner appointed a new CEO who decided to take a design-minded approach with the aim of bringing the company out of its losses.

### PROBLEM

The first step was mapping the current situation and **defining possible problems** that hinder success. During the audit, we conducted extensive background research - interviews with key stakeholders, production workers, with B2B clients and end users, surveys and analysis of retail sales data, store checks in Estonia and abroad, competition analysis, EMOR, Nielsen and other market research analysis, including product testing.

The audit revealed that **people's eating habits, taste preferences and needs have changed** - instead of warming up food at home, they wanted ready-to-eat meals, fresher and more modern flavors, healthier alternatives, and more convenient packaging. Mamma's **product portfolio addressed only a small part of the population**, the **assortment and tastes were morally outdated** and the **product range was too long** - the few good products were hard to find in the stores. It also turned out that the parent company's **Finnish brand strategy did not fit the context of Estonian consumers**.

### PROCESS

The **design audit** helped define the key issues. To create the solutions, a **steering group** of key management, personnel, sales, product development and production people was involved in the process, who underwent **service design training** and participated in **ideation workshops**. As a result of end user research **6 main end-user personas** were born, three of which were used to **redesign the product range** and **create several new product categories** - fresh salads, pancakes, sandwiches.

In order to bring new products to the consumer, the **brand strategy was also updated**, defining the uniquenesses and key messages to reach new customer segments. The new positioning and brand architecture was accompanied by a **graphic identity upgrade** - without changing the logo, the advertising agency Rakett did a good job **fixing the package design and communication** of the Mamma and Let's Go product lines, which finally began addressing its consumers.

Both the **employees** (product development team, testing) **and the end users were involved** in the creation of the new approach, and they were involved in dozens of tasting points set up in grocery stores. **Positive feedback** confirmed the correctness of the course and brought insights to create new flavors and products. In addition to product development, **employer brand update** process was launched, aiming to reorganize work processes as well as increase employee satisfaction and loyalty.

### RESULTS

As a result of the project, Saarioinen consciously started to **reduce the assortment and optimize the production processes**, focusing on the development of 4 product groups instead of the previous 7. Through the implementation of design thinking, **production became more profitable**, product development more successful and efficiency also increased in all individual product categories. **In 2018, the factory was profitable for the first time in 9 years** of operation, and it keeps growing. Thanks to a clear focus and user-centric product development, **product sales and profitability have improved** - TOP10 products account for 31% of turnover and the sales share of new products has increased by 100% compared to the past, significantly exceeding the set targets. An important sign of improved product development and user focus is the **achievement of the titles of Best Food, Ready Food and Dessert in Estonia**. Equally important is the recognition of the **improved employer's brand**, confirmed by the title of Raplamaa Employer of the Year and the healthiest and safest workplace - Saarioinen contributes to the local community and it has been noticed.

The Saarioinen Estonia case clearly shows how the outsider underdog became the best-known ready-to-eat food brand in Estonia thanks to design thinking approach, strong management and a dedicated team.