

“I’m true to my brand and true to my product.”



ENTREPRENEUR

President
Baensch Food Products Co.

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Kim Wall

On a recent busy morning in Kim Wall's cramped office at the Riverwest factory that houses Baensch Food Products Co., her mobile phone ringtone of "Benny and the Jets" blares repeatedly, leaving her to explain that the song serves as a reminder of an old friend from her childhood in Beloit.

Wall has owned the Milwaukee company, which produces the Ma Baensch brand of marinated herring, since 1999, when she purchased it from the Baensch family.

She took a circuitous path to Baensch, first beginning her work career as a certified public accountant.

"That was a little repetitive for me," Wall said.

She then did stints in residential and commercial real estate and banking. She later developed seasoning blends that shifted her career to the specialty food trade.

"I said, 'Why don't I buy a brand. It'll be a lot easier than start-

ing a brand,'" the 52-year-old Wall said of her purchase of the business.

When Wall took over Baensch, the company was losing market share and sales were declining. Since she bought Ma Baensch, sales have more than doubled. She succeeded in having markets shift Ma Baensch from the dairy section to the meat and seafood section, where profit margins are higher. She also has overseen the revamping of the Ma Baensch logo and developed a new tagline — "Kiss of Health Since 1932."

Wall also received Kosher certification for the product to appeal to a wider customer base and has been pushing the benefits of omega-3 fatty acids in the product.

Baensch gets its herring from a long-time supplier in Nova Scotia, which she said ensures quality.

"I'm true to my brand and true to my product," Wall said. "We

care about consistency."

John Komives, a business consultant, has served as a mentor for Wall and represented the former owners of Ma Baensch when they were looking for a buyer for the business.

"Kim has a trigger-quick mind," Komives said. "She took this business on and has become the Ma Baensch for this generation."

The business has many inherent challenges, including finding reliable employees. Ma Baensch has six year-round employees, but the work force expands to about 20 during the peak period from October through December.

Wall became involved in a program to assist offenders in the criminal justice system gain employment, and that program has provided a pipeline to many reliable workers, Wall said.

"The word is out that we are willing to hire felons," she said.

— Rich Rovito