



RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Cookware and utensils brand **de Buyer** is the first choice for many leading chefs courtesy of a product range that has stood the test of time. *FEJ* spoke to CEO **Guilhem Pinault** about his plans for the UK market and to find out why executing the perfect recipe requires the right utensils.

Having spent five years as general manager for global tools and storage at Stanley Black & Decker's Central and Eastern European operations, Guilhem Pinault is only too aware of how attached a tradesman can get to his tools.

Drills, screwdrivers and sanders might feel like a world away from pepper mills, pans and pastry moulds, but since becoming CEO of de Buyer 18 months ago he has discovered that the similarities are more pronounced than you might think.

"We are talking to experts who know what they want and what sort of tools they want to use, and they have got passion for their tools and their business. From that perspective, it's really not that much different," he says.

“ WE ARE LOOKING INTO CONTINUING THE GROWTH OF THE BUSINESS BY EXPANDING INTO ADDITIONAL PRODUCT CATEGORIES WHERE WE THINK THE BRAND WOULD BE CREDIBLE”

The culinary sector has certainly made an impression on the Frenchman, as has the philosophy of the business he now presides over. With a heritage that dates all the way back to 1830, the manufacturer of cooking and pastry utensils for gastronomy professionals is a renowned name in the hospitality field.

"In a company like de Buyer, the culture is embedded all the way down to the production line and the people have always been close to the customer," he explains. "Visitors who come to the factory talk to the workers on the floor, so the guy who

is actually manipulating the press will know lots of chefs. That proximity with the customer is fantastic to see at de Buyer and it is a big change for me. Being a smaller business [than Stanley Black & Decker], there is much more agility, much more flexibility. The customer relationship is rooted within the company."

Pinault took the reins from predecessor Claude Haumesser with a clear set of objectives that included steering it through the next phase of its digital transformation and making it more internationally focused. "We're aiming to move from a French

business exporting outside of France to a truly international organisation that is deeply rooted in every market it operates in,” he explains.

Germany, the US and, of course, the UK are among its main targets. It already has a significant foothold in the UK thanks to its partnership with Signature FSE, the Kent-based outfit that supports leading European brands of foodservice equipment for cooking, preparation, display and serving.

It has a proud history working with de Buyer, carrying a comprehensive selection of products in its showroom and providing restaurants, hotels and caterers with expert advice on selecting the right products for the right scenario.

“Half of our business comes from France and the other half from outside France, which is why it is important to have a strong international strategy. If we were able to achieve the level of penetration we have in France in any one of those strategic countries that we are dealing with, we’d be three, four or five times the size we are.”

While a global health pandemic certainly wasn’t part of Pinault’s planning when he took over the job, it has only served to accelerate the transformation that he is leading.

Like a lot of industry manufacturers, de Buyer saw orders come to a standstill in March as the crisis touched every corner of the world and hospitality businesses shut their doors, but the blow was quickly softened by



De Buyer CEO
Guilhem Pinault.

a sharp rise in orders from home and amateur chefs snapping up utensils and cooking accessories online.

“Where the amateur used to be 40% of our business and the chef 60%, all of a sudden we saw the amateur become 80% to 90% of our business in March and April during the crisis. I wouldn’t say that was enough to offset the lack of business from the pros, but at least it allowed us to survive. They basically saved us in March and April.”

May sales, meanwhile, were up 10% on the same month last year, indicating that many of those amateur customers have stuck with the brand and, indeed, ventured into retail stores that have subsequently reopened to stock up on more of its equipment.

Pinault will be relieved when the hospitality sector is open fully again and insists de Buyer will be there waiting to support professional chefs

PROFESSIONAL PRODUCTS LIST

- Steel cookware
- Non-stick cookware
- Stainless steel cookware
- Copper cookware
- Utensils
- Mandolins and slicers
- Knives
- Mills
- Silicone moulds
- Pastry
- Catering

and caterers that need kitchen utensils they can depend on. With a portfolio exceeding 2,500 items, product breadth is one of the company’s most valuable commodities.

Has the crisis dulled its appetite for producing such a vast range? “No, the main topic is still growth and we are not looking to reduce it because that’s what makes us so unique. We are an expert in many different materials — carbon steel, stainless steel, perforated stainless steel, copper, aluminium, non-stick — and because we serve the cooking industry, baking industry and pastry industry it requires a lot of variety in our offering.

“We’re certainly not looking into reducing that at all. In fact, we are looking into continuing the growth of the business by expanding into additional categories where we think the brand would be credible. I won’t tell you where those are today otherwise I could be disclosing a few secrets, but we definitely feel the brand has elasticity.”

De Buyer operates at the premium end of the market and its prices justify the workmanship and quality involved in the creation of its products. But Pinault stresses that it does not position itself as a “luxury” product.

“We have expensive products because they are extremely technological, they are precise and they help professionals gain productivity. If you want to heat 500 millilitres of milk and you have a de Buyer Affinity five layer saucepan, you are going to be able to heat milk three





De Buyer is known for the quality of its materials and production.

to five times faster than a regular pan at an opening price point. If you do that 120 times a day, you're actually going to save your brigade a couple of hours of work. So if you look at it from that perspective you have the real reason why these products are more expensive. We're not looking at luxury, we're looking at the control of the heat, the technicality of the product and its durability," he says.

This year marks de Buyer's 190th in business and Pinault is aware of the delicate balancing act between celebrating heritage and remaining relevant to market trends.

He says the company's ability to keep up with technology has been the backbone of its success, pointing to its induction-compatible copper range — comprised of 90% copper and 10% stainless steel rather than the other way round — the use of robotics within its manufacturing operations and its growing library of digital resources as evidence of its capacity to evolve.

The company has even created a 3D app to help chefs use its mandolins, providing an augmented reality view that brings the product to life.

De Buyer's links to colleges and culinary institutions — including Claire Clark Academy here in the UK — are important to the business and

5 DE BUYER FACTS

1. The company's heritage can be traced back to 1810 when boilerworks and ironworks were created to produce farmyard tools and instruments, such as food bowls and troughs, as well as domestic utensils.
2. In 1990, a significant strategic change took place when de Buyer stopped distributing its products to supermarkets because it was tarnishing its brand image. The company stayed away from the consumer market for 12 years and although this reduced its turnover by 50% it allowed it to forge strong partnerships with restaurateurs, businesses and culinary schools.
3. In 2008, the 'Atelier Hervé de Buyer' cooking school was launched, offering expertise on the kitchen utensils and panware emphasised in professional cooking techniques.
4. In 2014, de Buyer carried out a modernisation programme, which saw it rebuild its factory with the aim of increasing productivity and developing new products. It also added new office space and a showroom. A year later the de Buyer family sold its shares to the company Edify.
5. French chef Michel Roth became an ambassador for de Buyer products last year.



Pinault is keen to harness those ties moving forward. "Coming from a tools business, I know how important your first drill is when you start building something in construction school. The first brand you have in your hands can be absolutely critical for the rest of your career and you sort of adopt it providing it offers exactly the service you are looking for.

"Similarly, in the culinary business it's really important to be there. It's also very important to be able to convey the message about the importance of the material you are using and which products should be used for which recipe.

"If you do that early enough in the training process or the learning process then these cooks are going to carry that along for the rest of their careers and they will instantly understand the importance of their utensils. If you look at the success of a



chef, a third is their ability to pick up the right ingredients, a third is their ability to be creative and create a great recipe out of it, and the other third — which is very frequently forgotten — is the tools they are using to achieve what they want to achieve."

De Buyer has been standing alongside the best chefs in the industry for more than a century and Pinault insists the brand has the expertise and product range to support every kind of operator, from casual dining chains to Michelin Star restaurants.

"In the same way that operators look at porcelain to match their recipe, we believe they should look at utensils to match their menu, and we are here to provide them with the best products. De Buyer has helped French cuisine to be successful and by listening to customers and understanding their needs, we can help any business be successful in their own cuisine." **FEJ**