

BIM KEMI - A different road to success



50 years in business

BIM Kemi is celebrating 50 years in business – an important milestone that deserves celebration and recognition. Throughout the years, BIM Kemi has experienced significant growth, introduced numerous groundbreaking innovations, and brought different cultures and people together into one family.

These achievements are quite remarkable for a medium-sized, family-owned business from Sweden that started as a one man operation in a sandwich shop in Gothenburg. How was this even possible?

To understand more about BIM Kemi's journey to the company we are today, we have to go back to the start and get under the skin of our founder and owner, Peter Wällberg, to understand what has fuelled his determination to push boundaries over the years.

A growing passion for chemistry and Pulp and paper

It all started in a small town in Sweden, Västervik, where Peter was born on November 6, 1946. He grew up near the archipelago in a family of part-time fishermen. He got to ride along on the boat a lot which is how fishing became one of his main hobbies and still is. When Peter's father got a job at Holmens mill, a big paper mill in Norrköping, the family relocated. After school, Peter started an apprenticeship program at the mill, which was the entry point to the pulp and paper industry and ignited Peter's passion for the industry.

With a persistent curiosity in chemistry, Peter decided to pursue an engineering degree through evening classes while simultaneously working during the day. This arrangement proved highly beneficial for him, allowing him to apply his practical knowledge at work and acquire theoretical understanding through his academic studies. During his apprenticeship, Peter gained invaluable experience working in various capacities, including the workshop, operating room, and production floor in both the pulp and paper mills. This initial experience has been very valuable for Peter in his life, as many of these mills are our customers today.

After completing his training, Peter began his career as a laboratory technician at Fiskeby, focusing on quality development. After a few years, he joined an American supplier to Fiskeby as a salesman. During this time, the company supplied standard products for the pulp and paper industry and had a focus on strengthening their presence in Europe.

In the early 1970s, new processes and environmental considerations began to emerge, putting demands on new and specially tailored solutions. This intrigued Peter, and he had a lot of ideas and input of how to enhance customers' processes and end products, drawing from his combined experience of the pulp and paper process and chemical knowledge, by introducing improved concepts. However, working within a large American company it was challenging for him to be heard and get ideas put into practice. After a while, Peter grew frustrated with the inability to make a meaningful impact and decided to do it on his own – and this is how BIM Kemi was born.

“Starting a business was never something I really considered, but I couldn't ignore the industry's evolution and the new demand for specialty chemicals either”

BIM is born - from a sandwich shop to a global company

BIM Kemi was started in May 1973. Peter explains, - *You have to be a bit daft to do something like this. It has been studied - successful entrepreneurs are a bit special and a bit different, and that's probably what you need to be! You don't follow the mainstream.*

Peter embarked on his new venture by focusing on the development of cleaning agents specifically designed for

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Peter Wällberg,
Founder & Owner,
BIM Kemi AB

machine felts and covers, which he recognised as a pressing need. Various chemicals had been used in this area, each one more hazardous than the other, and sometimes the smell was awful, according to Peter. He believed there must be a more environmentally friendly solution to avoid releasing a lot of caustic substances, that were dangerous to handle and caused burns when dissolved in water, into the sewage system and, at the same time, eliminate the unpleasant skunk odour. Peter successfully developed a couple of effective liquid products to address these challenges. However, it soon became apparent that these alone didn't sustain the company.

"There were quite a few sleepless nights, and I know that I was practically in the bank's lap because I couldn't get any loans. I had to personally guarantee loans for the company. So, of course, I was worried, but I was so focused on solving problems and talking to customers that I found it enjoyable".

However, a turning point came when a colleague from the industry reached out to Peter. They had a type of polymer that they had been trying to sell to municipal wastewater treatment plants in Sweden for a long time without success. They proposed that BIM Kemi try these polymers out at the wastewater treatment plant where Peter's father was employed. If successful, they suggested BIM Kemi would sell these polymers on their behalf and become their agent in Sweden.

Intrigued by the opportunity, Peter and his father decided to test the polymers at the wastewater treatment plant. The polymers proved to be effective and BIM Kemi began selling these polymers for many years, significantly boosting the company's cash flow. This allowed Peter to hire the first employee, and then the next, and the next. That's how it all started.

In 1975, BIM Kemi began to thrive. In 1976, by chance during a customer visit, Peter came into contact with Sjöviks Industri AB. He found them intriguing and started investigating the company, eventually establishing a partnership with them. In 1977, the companies jointly developed the Aquamol 1500 series, which marked the beginning of an amazing journey. Peter acquired Sjövik Industrier, and BIM Kemi continued to flourish. Soon, larger facilities were needed, and the current premises in Stenkullen were purchased and expanded as the company grew by 25-30% every year. Peter fondly recalls, *"We had fun, and many of the innovations we made turned into real products. We found a niche where what we developed was*

probably too small of a market for the really big players, or they didn't see it, and the technology was too complex because we were buying technology."

As the years passed, BIM Kemi continued to grow and expand globally through acquisitions of companies with established production units and the establishment of sales offices. These endeavors have shaped BIM Kemi into the global company it is today.

The family's perspective on BIM's development and future

From the start, BIM Kemi has been a privately-owned, family company. The family firmly agrees on the company's long-term vision of remaining a family business and fostering growth through active ownership. A family strategy has been established, emphasizing the importance of a professional board and the family's active involvement either within or outside the company. Peter says, "to be able to work in the company actively we need to educate ourselves to be professional owners. It is an art in itself - not to meddle too much but still be there. To be a support to the CEO and management and speak up if something is wrong. But it's a delicate balance!"

The core purpose of BIM Kemi is to be a reliable partner for customers who appreciate our unique way of working, and in doing so, solve their process issues that may arise, address challenges, or improve their quality. This commitment is deeply ingrained in our vision. And it's exactly what we do.

From the very beginning, BIM Kemi exhibited a strong commitment to environmental concerns, even when the industry viewed it as an unnecessary expense. BIM Kemi can be considered pioneers who persevered in pursuing our own path, breaking traditional patterns. The passion and belief in our own idea combined with an unwavering determination have been driving forces throughout the company's journey. And this is something we will continue to do also in the future.

*"This journey wouldn't have been possible without all the talented employees we have had over the years and who feel ownership of the projects - they are engaged, enjoy their work, and have fun. The staff has truly meant everything, everything, everything!
It's easy to be a leader when you have great staff!"*

