

In memoriam: Markus Gerber – ‘Mister Toblerone’

With sadness and great respect we report the passing of Markus Gerber, one of the most influential and respected pioneers of our industry. Markus is the man universally acclaimed for putting the confectionery category on the travel retail world map.

Markus (86) began his career in confectionery with Tobler in Berne. The company was later acquired by Jacobs Suchard. Philip Morris, which had bought Kraft in 1988, also took over Jacobs Suchard in 1990. This led to the creation of Kraft Jacobs Suchard, a forerunner of today's Mondelez International.

By creating and then driving the dedicated International Duty Free Division in 1994, Markus was instrumental in raising the profile of confectionery (chocolate in particular) from marginal status to a front-line category, a standing it enjoys to this day. In particular, he is associated with the building of Toblerone as a blockbuster duty free brand.



Markus Gerber pictured on an emotional day when he was invited as a special guest to the travel retail division's 25th anniversary. A tribute video to him from leading travel retail industry figures was a highlight of the occasion.

Former Mondelez World Travel Retail Managing Director **Andreas Fehr**, who spent 24 years with Mondelez International and its predecessor companies including Kraft Foods World Travel Retail, said, “Markus – or ‘Mister Toblerone’ as some industry colleagues often called him – was a highly respected industry legend who many in travel retail have worked with in the early days of the travel retail industry.

“He was a true pioneer who tirelessly travelled the world to promote his beloved brand Toblerone thereby making it the No. 1 brand in travel retail. Markus was a great character whose philosophy is probably best described as ‘work hard, play hard’ My condolences go out to his wife, his family and friends.”

“He was a pioneer, a great man and will always be known as Mr Toblerone. RIP Marcus,” said Ontario International Airport Authority Chief Commercial Officer **Dan Cappell**, who earlier in his career set up Nestlé International Travel Retail, a rival powerhouse in the channel.



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Former Mondelez World Travel Retail Managing Director Andreas Fehr



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Markus is an example for generations to come. In a world where people are so concerned about their own wellbeing and gratification, he truly gave, served and was most concerned with the wellbeing of all others, be it personally or professionally.

Mondelez World Travel Retail
Managing Director Jaya Singh

Andreas Fehr’s successor at Mondelez World Travel Retail **Jaya Singh**, who also worked with Markus for many years, said: “Markus was a tremendous human being with a wonderfully sensitive nature combined with a tiger-like attitude when it came to business building.

“I remember a story which he frequently told me. His father had a bakery business and every morning as a young boy and then young man Markus would be tasked with selling almost door to door a load of freshly baked bread. His father used to say to him ‘You don’t come back till you’ve sold everything.’ For Markus these were the character-forming days.

“He stood for certain principles and qualities:

- Always finish what you start
- Unrelenting perseverance and resilience
- The value of total responsibility
- Always finding ways to sell

“He brought all these qualities to starting our duty free and travel retail business. Most importantly these were the very foundations of the DNA that he laid and which lived on in our business. Where we are today as

category leaders is down to where we came from – his instrumental legacy of the above as well as constant creativity and solutions-finding approach.

“He was a man of real character as well as integrity. Always had a heart for the not so fortunate and would go out of his way to help. A true family man as well – and a delightful and accomplished piano player.



Markus Gerber: Where we are today as category leaders is down to where we came from, says Jaya Singh of his old boss

“He hired me, gave me a chance in duty free/travel retail. He built up the confectionery category in the industry. And, yes, he did this by literally carrying in his suitcase samples of Toblerone and trying to get them listed with customers. He spent so much time on the road, making personal sacrifices.



In late 2021 and early 2022, Mondelez World Travel Retail ran a creative digital engagement drive themed #TravelisBack for Toblerone, designed to connect with a new generation of travellers and highlight Toblerone as a nostalgic travel tradition. More than anyone else, Markus Gerber created that tradition.

“Markus is an example for generations to come. I only have the utmost admiration for him and the only way that I can think of honouring him is to continue to resonate powerfully his values and ethics and build even further the business – but with a heartbeat that reflects his heartbeat of care for all.

“In a world where people are so concerned about their own wellbeing and gratification, he truly gave, served and was most concerned with the wellbeing of all others, be it personally or professionally. A champion who was ahead of his time.”

Rajiv Malhotra, another former long-term colleague of Markus, and now Chief Executive Officer at Singapore-based Lead In Travel Retail, said: “Markus interviewed me way back in 1996-97 when I was working for Jashanmal, the distributor for Kraft Jacobs Suchard in Dubai He was a fine person.

“We went sales calling together to Oman, Bahrain and Abu Dhabi. The one thing he pulled me up for during one of my meetings was that I did not carry a note pad and pen as a salesman and did not take notes during a meeting. I remember that very well and from then onwards always carried a pad and pen.

“This was a great learning and he was an institution. May his soul Rest In Peace.”

Mondelez World Travel Retail Senior Business Development Manager Latin America **Mathis Dreher** said:

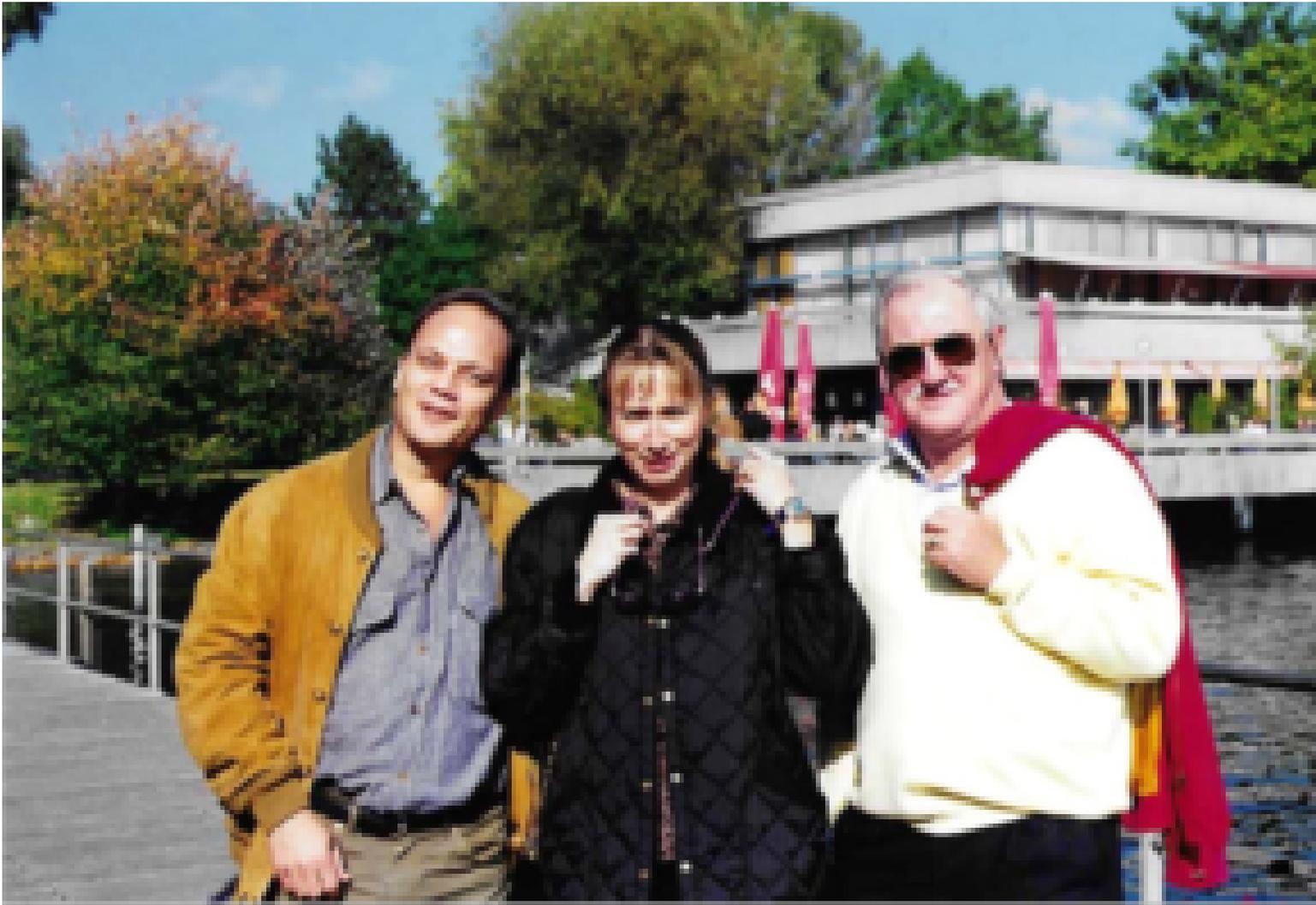
“His influence was immense on me as he hired me for his newly created duty free division in early 1996. Markus was a true pioneer in our industry and created our confectionery category in duty free.

“Markus managed ‘his’ division with an entrepreneurial drive and business acumen second to none with a legendary focus on establishing great and enduring personal customer relationships beyond the business aspect – even if he had to close the bar himself. He was harder than stone with his unrelenting vision to establish Toblerone as #1 in duty free. He was a true industry icon and one of our founding fathers.

“An anecdote from the beginning of my career: I once got hammered by Markus because allegedly I did not spend enough on customers’ entertainment! He was a true pioneer for whom anything than double-digit growth needed immediate corrective actions including his famous ‘internal briefings’.

“When he decided that Toblerone needed to be listed with a customer, no obstacle could stop him reaching his goal. Whether it was an overnight trip to NYC, entertaining customers in the best restaurants or even socialising with them until early morning at the bar – everything he did was always with a strategic agenda.

“I only worked with him for two years but in hindsight it feels like it was over a decade because he imprinted such a strong entrepreneurial culture in the DNA of our global duty free division. Another distinctive trait was that he was very down to earth, unpacking the products at the trade shows himself. He was clearly a visionary industry leader whose impact helped the whole confectionery category conquer its space in the industry.”



Flashback to 1998: Mathis Dreher (left), Conny Levi and Markus Gerber in Zürich



Martin Moodie writes: The warm tributes of his long-time

associates say everything about Markus' career, commitment and contribution. They also affirm his humanity. Long ago when I was a young journalist – so by definition a very long time ago – Markus was one of the people who helped me find my way in the business.

He loved to talk about travel retail in general, the confectionery category in particular, and a certain triangular chocolate bar most of all. But his purpose was always to teach me rather than to seek publicity and I suspect I was just one of very many respectful students.

When one looks at the sophistication and success of the travel retail channel today, it is easy to take for granted the 'hard yards' that those who built our industry put in. Markus was one of the chief builders and every single bar of Toblerone, a product today arguably more synonymous with duty free shopping than any other, represents a piece of his legacy. Rest in Peace Markus – Mr Toblerone.

Note: The Moodie Davitt Report joins in expressing our sorrow and condolences to Markus's family. We will be updating this story soon. Readers can pay their tributes via the Disqus platform below.