

„Managing Knowledge Is Ever More Important“



Gabriella Karger: 'My great-grandfather Samuel Karger, who founded the publishing company on 1 April 1890, said: 'We are brokers of knowledge.' This is still the case today: Our goal is to serve science.'

Foto: Christian Flierl

Karger Medical and Scientific Publishers in Basel, Switzerland, is an independent family-owned company that has been successful for 125 years. CEO Gabriella Karger talks about the strong Swiss franc, the new Karger Fund for scholarships to study Academic Management at the University of Basel and her fascination with the founder of modern anatomy, Andreas Vesalius.

What kind of literature does Karger publish?

My great-grandfather Samuel Karger founded the publishing company on 1 April 1890 in Berlin. Way back then, he said: 'We are brokers of knowledge.' At Karger Publishers, we draw together relevant information from the broad fields of medical and scientific research, have it examined by independent experts and then transform it into a reader-friendly format to make it accessible to the scientific world.

A special feature of scientific publishers is the input from outside experts regarding content and know-how. In the case of Karger, who are these people and what role do they play?

The editors-in-chief of our electronic and printed books and journals are experts from research, clinical practice, academia and the pharmaceutical industry throughout the world. They are our most important partners, and they guarantee the good reputation and high standard of our publications. We put great emphasis on direct and personal contact with them.



250 persons work at Karger Publishers worldwide, 200 of them at the headquarters in Basel, Switzerland.

This sounds lively and creative.

(Grins.) It's hard work being in charge of such an enterprise and this spurs me on. But I also experience creative moments, for example with the book of Andreas Vesalius' oeuvre.

Vesalius is considered the founder of modern anatomy. In 2014, Karger brought out an English translation of his original works, first published in Latin in Basel in the 16th century. This new version is entitled 'The Fabric of the Human Body'. How did you come to have such an interest in this Flemish doctor?

Vesalius was an outstanding scientist. He believed in his discoveries and overcame all obstacles in his path. What was groundbreaking for his time was that he himself dissected the cadavers. With his unique representation of the human body in a series of figures and tables, he created a revolutionary style of transcribing information, inventing, as it were, the forerunner of the powerpoint presentation.

Our Vesalius project was a great opportunity to apply concepts and focus on details that Karger has considered worthy for the last 125 years: content of a high quality, a reader-friendly layout and careful preparation of images. I'm going to go on talking for hours if you don't stop me. *(Laughs.)*

From your headquarters in Switzerland, you manage a publishing company with 250 employees worldwide. What is your policy of management?

I see myself as *prima inter pares* (first among equals; ed.). I believe in networking and I am convinced that animated exchange with our colleagues and partners in the working environment produces the best results.



You mention the 125th Karger anniversary. What does it mean to you personally?

I'm proud that, as an enterprise, we have been able to remain independent and that the fourth generation of our family is leading our publishing company. We are managing to keep pace with our competitors, even the really big ones, and also keep fit on the technology track. There have been many developments, but our fundamental aim, the dissemination of reliable scientific knowledge from the results of research, has endured. On our 125th anniversary, Karger Publishers stands for continuity and transformation.

What consequences does the suspension of the fixed euro exchange rate have for your company?


Our headquarters are in Switzerland, so we cover all costs in Swiss francs. The current situation, with the franc being one-to-one with the euro, is obviously affecting us. As we export most of our publications, we are accustomed to having to regularly consider our policy with regard to other currencies. In relation to the US dollar and the euro, the risk is all ours. Where other currencies are concerned, the risk is carried by the client, in other words, the libraries and booksellers. We also have a very personal contact with our customers and are in constant communication about these issues.

Karger Publishers has a tradition of producing everything in-house, from IT to layout. Is outsourcing not an option?

For many years now, the production stages of some of our publications have taken place in India. Our contact there was originally established by my father, Thomas Karger. A regular, technical exchange with them is upheld which is of great benefit to our publications. We work externally with other partners as well. It wouldn't be possible to continue otherwise, and it keeps us flexible. Nevertheless, we want to keep the publishing know-how in-house – without it, taking on a project like the Vesalius book would not have been possible.

Open Access presents a challenge for Karger and other Science, Technology and Medicine Publishers, with the authors or their institutes financing the publication of studies. With other models, it is the reader or the library member who pays for access to articles published. How does Karger deal with Open Access?

We do also offer Open Access publications. To this end, a special search function has been created on our website. In connection with this, there are issues regarding copyright and



license which I take very seriously. There are too many authors who have too little information about the consequences of making their scientific papers freely available on the Internet. As medical publishers it is also our responsibility to inform them of their authors' rights.

All Karger publications are also put online. In fact, some journals are available only in an electronic format.

We endeavor to optimize the circulation of our publications regardless of the form in which research data are submitted. We also make sure that an article can be found and used! An important question to ask is: What is the best way for scientists and researchers to obtain the information they require, which data should appear alongside and where is everything to be found? For publishers of quality, this is a central task.

How do you handle the ever-increasing multidisciplinary nature of research?

I'll give you an example: with cardiovascular disease, the kidneys are often affected and vice versa. We recognized the fusion of the fields of Cardiology and Nephrology early on and started publishing the new journal 'Cardiorenal Medicine' that links these two disciplines. The good contact with our editors helps us to detect the upcoming trends. At Karger Publishers, innovation is a tradition. These days, it is just a question of how fast one should act.

As fast as possible, in order to stay in the market, but not so fast that standards suffer?

I discuss this time and again with our authors and editors. A scientific study including the final report takes two to three years to be completed, and only then can an article on the topic be written. There is, of course, the hope that it will receive optimal exposure – and the expectation is that it's going to get published overnight. As a scientific text should have lasting impact, the necessary time should be given for the validation of its content, the editing of the text and the careful production. But to achieve this it will take many more discussions and much work to convince people.

Time is money, and as a scientist, you have to publish as many articles as possible if you want to make a career.

We manage to fulfill our own quality demands where the speed benchmark is concerned in spite of our high standards. However, like the magical triangle of project management, quality, time and costs all depend on but do not necessarily support each other.



Karger Publishers is offering scholarships for studies in Academic Management to the University of Basel. How come?

It is becoming more and more important to be able to 'manage' knowledge, even when one is operating in the field of research. We are launching this Fund, on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of Karger Publishers and the 555th anniversary of the University of Basel, to support scientists who want to obtain an MBA in Academic Management.

'Inheriting the Future' is the motto of this Karger anniversary. How important is the history of Karger for you?

My great-grandfather Samuel Karger and my grandfather Heinz Karger must have had extremely interesting personalities. With courage, they overcame the difficult times in which they lived. My father Thomas Karger, who turned 85 this year, soon saw to it that our publishing company became an international enterprise; today we are present on every continent. He is an entrepreneur with heart and soul and his contribution to the success of Karger is undisputed. I have the greatest respect for him and for my brother Steven Karger, who died much too young (Karger's CEO from 1999 to 2008; ed.). Steven was at the helm when Karger Publishers entered the digital age.

Back to the present: What are you looking forward to the most in this year of the anniversary?

To the big party at the end of June with all our employees! My birthday wish for Karger Publishers is that we may continue to keep up with the times. Our main goal remains to serve science.