

# GANT

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Lennart Björk, Chairman, Gant

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## SPOILT FOR CHOICE

Last year Gant AB, the Swedish fashion brand, needed a new Chief Executive, and Chairman Lennart Björk feared that finding the right person, reasonably quickly, could be difficult.

He explains: “We needed someone who understood our heavily design-led culture, who had the international experience to be able to deal with our partners in 50 countries, who spoke Swedish and who was prepared to live in Sweden. Add to that Sweden’s high taxes, terrible weather and relatively low CEO pay, and you see the scale of the task.”

To compound the challenge, Björk’s previous experience with headhunters had not been positive. “They had never delivered great results,” he says. “Then a friend recommended Alumni.”

Björk briefed Alumni in September 2007, and while the consultancy had, initially, to ‘sell’ the role to potential candidates, Björk admits that because the Gant brand is high profile, it was an attractive proposition for people interested in marketing, design and international business.

Nevertheless, he was delighted with the job Alumni did. “They were very easy to work with. They interviewed us many times to get a thorough understanding of our top management, our culture and our expectations. They did much more homework than other headhunters I had worked with over the years appeared to do.”

Not only was Gant able to make an offer within three months of briefing Alumni, but they were spoilt for choice, says Björk.

“We had a shortlist of three candidates, any one of whom could have done the job. Again, in my experience of headhunters, that is unusual. You are lucky to find one suitable person.”

The successful candidate was a Dutchman who was married to a Swede, had been to university in Sweden, and had lived all over the world during his career with Tetrapak.

But the story didn’t end there. A couple of days after making the appointment, Gant was subject to a hostile bid from Swiss retailing conglomerate Maus Frères.

“I thought we would lose our man,” admits Björk. “But he took the takeover bid (which became friendly) very well. That demonstrated his commitment and augured well for the future.”

Although the new Chief Executive didn’t join Gant until 1st July, Björk had ample opportunity to see him in action in various meetings before he officially took up his post.

“He was very impressive,” he says.

Alumni were impressive too. “We will definitely use them again,” says Björk. “After a performance like that we will stick with them. We are very loyal.”



- Swedish fashion brand Gant needed a new Chief Executive, but not only would the role be quite tricky to fill, but Chairman Lennart Björk was also sceptical about the ability of headhunters to help
- A business associate recommended Alumni, who quickly fielded a shortlist of three strong candidates, allowing Gant to make an appointment within three months of putting out the brief
- The new Chief Executive proved his mettle even before he joined, being unfazed by a hostile takeover bid and impressing Björk, the rest of the board and customers in a series of meetings