



Portrait:

## Melitta Bentz: 150 years - Inventor's Heart

**Melitta Bentz would have been 150 years old on 31 January 2023. She invented the coffee filter in 1908 laying the foundations for today's Melitta Group. But what kind of person was Melitta Bentz? What made her special?**

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Melitta Bentz was an extraordinary woman. She was tremendously committed and assertive. Her strength of will and tenacity, combined with considerable creativity and visionary thinking, set her apart. Not only did she have an unerring business sense, but she was also incredibly warm hearted.

When she had an idea that she believed in, she was totally committed to bringing it to fruition. This was true not only of her inventions, but also of manufacturing and marketing processes, as well as social and community projects.

With her wealth of ideas, her courage and her perseverance, she was not only a successful inventor and entrepreneur but also a pioneer of her time. She combined her role as mother of three and housewife with that of a successful businesswoman - and therefore she still stands as a role model for balancing career and family life today.

### Ahead of her time

A passion for questioning the status quo and creating something new characterised Melitta Bentz throughout her life. This can be seen in her first and most important invention. She loved coffee, but like many others she was annoyed by the coffee grounds in the cup and the bitter taste. What most people at the time accepted as inevitable triggered Melitta Bentz's ambition and drive. She looked into ways of filtering coffee and finally came up with the idea of pouring the coffee through a brass cup fitted with a sheet of blotting paper. This simple but ingenious idea gave rise to the first paper coffee filter, which revolutionised coffee drinking around the world.

Together with her husband Hugo Bentz, she registered a whole series of patents in the years to come. In addition to different types of coffee filters, she also developed ideas for piggy banks, razors, jars, fruit juice filters and much more. Her interest in new techniques and processes was also evident in the marketing and manufacturing of the products. For example, she focused early on the power of the brand, she registered trademarks and came up with graphic lettering, a logo and other identifying features. Her great flexibility during the First World War also testifies to her capacity for innovation. When the import of coffee was banned, Melitta Bentz switched production to cardboard boxes for a few years.

### Putting ideas into practice

Being creative and having good ideas is one thing. Making use of them, putting them into practice and achieving success with them is the other. Melitta Bentz developed her inventions and ideas with great passion and with the necessary amount of pragmatism. In doing so, she never lost sight of her goals and followed them through even in the face of considerable opposition.



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As a woman, she had to fight against resistance again and again at the beginning of the 20th century. A woman as inventor and entrepreneur was not in keeping with the traditional role that the law and society of the time assigned to women. Then there was the fact that the Bentz's were not rich, so did not have great financial resources to fall back on. Melitta Bentz was the daughter of a publishing bookseller, her husband was a department manager in a department store. When it was founded, the young company had a cash balance of just 72 Reichspfennig.

### **Great dedication leads to success**

Frugality was therefore a virtue born of necessity for the Bentz family. In the early years of the 'M. Bentz' company, the couple did almost everything themselves. For years, the filters were packed by hand in their own home. To present their products, Melitta and Hugo Bentz themselves visited countless household goods stores, department stores, trade fairs and exhibitions. They gave live presentations to the public on the advantages of the filters and on how to use them. Their three children also got involved early on distributing brochures, transporting the goods and helping with the production.

The family's daily routine usually began at 5 a.m. and did not end before midnight - even on weekends. In addition to running the business, Melitta Bentz was also responsible for the household and raising the children. It was only after the First World War that there was enough money to hire domestic help. Then they were also able to take on enough employees to run the production, so that the Bentz's could largely withdraw from involvement in that kind of work.

### **The company's social conscience**

However, Melitta Bentz was not only focused on the success of the company and the well-being of her family. She also felt a close connection to her employees. Their rights and needs were close to her heart, and so she always tried to foster a spirit of togetherness and a feeling of belonging in the company.

Since the 1930s, the employees received salaries and annual leave far above the industry average. The company provided social benefits that were unusual for the time. Through the 'Melitta Help' fund, employees received financial benefits if they found themselves in special circumstances and needed help. She also arranged for a company health insurance fund to be set up with reduced costs for employees.

### **The DNA of the Melitta Group**

Melitta Bentz's extraordinary personality continues to shape the culture and team spirit within the Melitta Group to this day. Her creativity, her drive and her entrepreneurial thinking are in the company's DNA. In particular, her 'Inventor's Heart' and the sense of togetherness she always fostered in the spirit of having a joint impact still define the Melitta Group today and are its strength and foundation for the future.