Founded in 1890, W&H today operates globally as a leading manufacturer of dental instruments and devices. With over 1,200 employees worldwide, the company exports its products to over 110 countries. The family-owned business runs two production sites in Bürmoos and one in Brusaporto in Italy, as well as 19 subsidiaries in Europe, Asia and North America. Recently, W&H President Peter Malata sat down with Dental Tribune to discuss the enduring success and philosophy of the company.

Only a few dental companies worldwide can look back at a 125-year history. In your opinion, what are the main reasons for the long-standing success of W&H?

There are several factors to which I would attribute our successful participation in the dental market for such a long time. Firstly, innovation. W&H’s history is a story of numerous technological developments and innovations, such as the Roto Quick coupling, the first push-button chuck system for turbines, the first high-speed contra-angle handpiece for preparation up to 200,000 rpm; Assistina, the world’s first cleaning and maintenance unit; Lisa, the first Class B steriliser available on the market; Synea Vision, the first turbine with 3× ring LED’s, and our latest innovation, the Primea Advanced Air turbine. We have continuously provided products and services—tailored customer solutions made in Austria—that not only support dentists and their teams on a daily basis, but also make their daily work easier. Our products are used in dental practices, dental clinics, dental laboratories, and oral and maxillofacial surgeries in over 110 countries around the world.

Secondly, our internal apprenticeship programme is of particular priority to us. We regard this as an investment in the future. With our comprehensive training programme, we not only focus on the professional education of young people, but also support their personal development.

Third, we rely on continuity: we put an enormous amount of trust into our employees. Team spirit is of utmost importance to us. The level of education of our workforce...

INTERVIEW

W&H President Peter Malata
(Photograph: Gregor Sams/PunktFormStrich)
As a member of the Malata family, you have headed the company for over 20 years. Looking back, what have been the most significant developments or achievements during that time?

I took over the business from my father, Consul Dr Pieter Malata, in 1996. My goal was not only to grow the business, but also to keep our processes lean. That’s why I decided in 1998 to introduce a business-oriented structure in the company, just to name one significant measure of many. Today, about 700 employees at our headquarters in Burmoo are organized into over 100 teams.

Another important cornerstone was the internationalization of W&H. Today, we operate three production sites—two in Burmoo and one in Brusaporto—and 19 subsidiary companies around the globe.

How do you approach innovation at W&H?

The basis for W&H’s steady growth is the consistent employment of state-of-the-art technologies and a dedicated focus on research and development. I believe that innovation is the engine of a company and my personal goal is to create more room for it. The continuous expansion of our R & D department involves not only hiring additional staff, but also the creation of new spaces that allow for open and foster creative collaboration and communication. In addition, we focus on collaboration with universities and research centers, as well as on continuous feedback from customers regarding their experiences.

Currently, around 15 per cent of our employees work in the R & D department at our headquarters. The focus of their activities is on innovative, high-quality medical devices and intelligent solutions for our customers and partners. The goal is optimal support for dentists in their day-to-day work with advanced hardware and software solutions. The close cooperation between the development and manufacturing departments has allowed W&H to respond quickly to changes in the market and incorporate customer requirements into new, sustainable solutions.

Ostell is known for its implant stability measurement and osseointegration monitoring products. The acquisition was part of our strategy to expand into the surgical segment. Our aim is to broaden our competence and strengthen our position as a leader in the field of implantology.

In addition to your production facilities in Austria and Italy, you currently maintain subsidiaries in 19 countries around the world. What are the key markets for you, and where do you see most potential for growth in the future?

W&H is active globally and our efforts are extended to all markets. We do not have specific goals for the different markets according to their needs. To identify these, we have our 19 subsidiaries, 16 area managers, and a vast network of outstanding reliable partners, who allow W&H to guarantee rapid delivery and seamless technical service anywhere in the world.

In recent years, we have also established subsidiaries in China and India and strengthened our sales activities in the Asia Pacific region. These are the markets in which we see the greatest potential at the moment.

The dental market is changing faster than ever before. What are your strategies for staying ahead in this challenging environment? Our main goal is to provide true added value to our clients with all our products and services. As mentioned before, we are focused strongly on R & D and— I am personally very proud to say— doing so with great success. The Primea Advanced Air, for example, recently received the State Prize Innovation [national innovation award] from the Austrian Ministry of Economy.

With the Primea Advanced Air turbine, the rotation speed of the bur can now be set precisely and as a result of electronic regulation remains constant even when the contact pressure increases. In addition to the innovative drive technology, the turbine offers all the advantages of a W&H Synea Vision turbine.

Finally, the interconnectivity of our products and services is playing an increasingly important role, for example the option to control our tools via smartphone, tablet, and automated inventory management and service scheduling.

Where do you see W&H in the next ten to 20 years?

W&H has further expanded its position in the global dental market and has established relationships with many key players and respected by competitors.

Thank you very much for the interview.