Interview: “I believe that innovation is the engine of a company”

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 LEDs; and our latest innovation, the Prima 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...
is very high and expertise is passed on from colleague to colleague. Addi-
tionally, we rely on a genera-
tional mix within our teams and a long-lasting staff membership, en-
abling continuity and thus produc-
tivity at a very high level.

As a member of the Malata family, you have headed the company for over 20 years. Looking back, what have been the most significant de-
velopments or achievements during that time?

I took over the business from my father; Consul Di Peter 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 team-oriented struc-
ture in the company, just to name one significant measure of many. Today, about 700 employ-
es at our headquarters in Bür-
moos are organised into over 100 teams.

Another important corner-
stone was the internationalisa-
tion of W&H. Today, we operate three production sites—two in Bur-
moos and one in Brus-
saporto—and 19 subsidiary com-
panies around the globe.

How do you approach innovation at W&H?

The basis for W&H’s steady growth is the consistent employ-
ment of state-of-the-art technol-
egies and a dedicated focus on re-
search and development. I be-
think that innovation is the en-
gine of a company and my per-
personal goal is to create more room for it. The continuous ex-
ansion of our R & D department involves not only the hiring of ad-
ditional staff, but also the cre-
ation of workplaces that allow for and foster creative collaboration and communication. In addition, we focus on collaboration with universities and research centres, as well as obtaining ongoing feed-
back from users regarding their experiences.

Currently, around 13 per cent of our employees work in the R & D department at our headquar-
ters. The focus of their activities is on innovative, high-quality medical devices and intelligent solutions for our customers and partners. The goal is optimal sup-
port for dentists in their day-to-
day work with advanced hard-
ware 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 cus-
tomer requirements into new, sustainable solutions.

At W&H, “People have Priority”. Would you please explain the phi-
losophy behind this slogan?

As a global dental company, we serve all people in maintaining and improving dental health. We are a family business and have been family-owned for 60 years. We strive for long-term, trusting and appreciative relationships with patients, customers, partners and employees, on relationships on which one can depend. Our corpo-
rate values—reliability, expertise, openness and sustainability—are therefore not just on paper, but ac-
tually realised.

In March 2018, you launched a new image campaign, “From a patient to a fan”. How has this influenced the perception of your company by patients and customers?

We have received very posi-
tive feedback on our new image campaign, directly from custom-
ers and partners, as well as via our social media channels. We want to make it clear to dentists and their practice teams that W&H is there for them as a solu-
tions provider and does its ut-
most to support them in over-
coming their daily challenges.

In practice, this means that our products offer true added value to the treatment process. By optimising and streamlining workflows, we want to enable dentists and their teams to give

Ostell is known for its implant sta-
bility measurement and one-
teckentration monitoring products. The acquisition was part of our strategy to expand into the surgi-
cal 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 facil-
ities in Austria and Italy, you cur-
rently 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 of course have spe-
cific goals for the different mar-
tets according to their needs. To identify these, we have our 19 sub-
сидaries, 16 area managers, and a vast number of outstanding relatable partners, who allow W&H to guarantee rapid delivery and seamless technical service any-
where 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 poten-
tial 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 men-
tioned before, we are focused strongly on R & D and—I am per-
sonal very proud to say—doing so with great success. The Prima Ad-
anced Air Forens were recently re-
cived the Staatspreis Innovation [national innovation award] from the Austrian Ministry of Economy.

With the Prima Advanced Air turbine, the rotation speed of the bur can now be set precisely and as a result of electronic regu-
lates remains constant even when the contact pressure in-
creases. In addition to the innovative drive technology, the turbine offers all the advantages of a W&H Synca Vision turbine.

Finally, the interconnectivity of our products and services is playing an increasing role, for ex-
ample the option to control our tools via smartphone or tablet, and automated inventory man-
agement and service scheduling.

Where do you see W&H in the near to ten years to come?

W&H has further expanded its position in the global dental market, with new products, teams, partners and respected by competitors.

Thank you very much for the inter-
view.

INTERVIEW

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