“Foreign markets are very important to us”

An interview with Olaf Sauerbier, CEO of VOCO GmbH, Cuxhaven, Germany

VOCO, based in Cuxhaven on the northern coast of Germany, is an established international provider of high-quality dental materials. In addition to products for restorative dentistry, it offers a wide range of materials and preparations for the fields of prosthetics and prophylaxis. Dental Tribune Group Editor Daniel Zimmermann spoke with Olaf Sauerbier, CEO and chief of Marketing and Sales, about new products and aesthetic trends in restorative dentistry.

Daniel Zimmermann: The Association of Dental Dealers in Europe (ADDE) has recently predicted growth rates above 3 per cent for most European dental markets. Do you see any signs of recovery in your company?

Olaf Sauerbier: To be honest with you, the recession never really caught us. We usually tend to perform slightly better than the overall market and expect to be no different for this business year. The year 2010 started off better than last year ended, and we saw some significant growth in most of our business segments in the first and second quarters. Although we have invested significantly in our German businesses by extending our sales team by 15 new employees, foreign markets are very important to us. At the moment, we are expanding our existing businesses worldwide, especially in North America. It will be a while before we are able to take full advantage of the enormous potential this market has to offer.

Did the products you introduced two years ago at IDS Cologne meet your expectations?

The most important product we introduced at IDS in terms of sales was definitely the non-run, non-drip NDT syringe. This new delivery form helped us to increase sales of most of our highly flowable materials like Grandio Flow, Grandio Seal and Ionoseal. Our gingiva-shaded restoration system Amaris Gingiva has also shown good performance. We have to admit that the market for such a product is still small, but, on the other hand, we see the demand for aesthetic restorations of exposed necks of teeth increasing owing to demographic changes and people ageing. Those who have highly aesthetic requirements will find it hard to pass this product by.

Another bestseller has been the one-component, light-curing, nano-reinforced, self-etch bond Futurabond M that we launched in SingleDose and in a three-bottle value pack. Not to forget the Rebilda Post System, an award-winning complete system for placing 15 posts in post-endodontic treatment, that sold successfully in Germany and abroad within a short amount of time.

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SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 28
10:00 – 11:00 Howard Glazer, DDS, FAGD
BEAUTIFUL: GO WITH THE FLOW - COURSE: 3020
11:20 – 12:20 John Fruke, DDS
LIGHT CURED ADHESIVE DENTISTRY - SCIENCE AND SUBSTANCE - COURSE: 3030
12:20 – 1:20 Martin Goldstein, DMD
A SIMPLIFIED APPROACH TO MULT-LAYER DIRECT COMPOSITE BONDING - COURSE: 3040
2:40 – 3:40 Jai Rennick, DMD, MD
3D IMAGING AND CT-GUIDED DENTAL IMPLANT SURGERY - 3050
4:00 – 5:00 Louis Maimanoff, DDS, MAGD
TOTAL FACIAL ESTHETICS FOR EVERY DENTAL PRACTICE - COURSE: 3060

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 29
10:00 – 11:00 Mr. Neil Rosenzweig
ECO-FRIENDLY INFECTION CONTROL UNDERSTANDING THE BALANCE - COURSE: 4120
11:20 – 12:20 Greg Kurtzman, DDS
INTEGRATING NEW ADVANCES IN DENTAL MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES INTO YOUR RESTORATIVE PRACTICE - COURSE: 4130
1:20 – 2:20 Damien Mekon, DDS
OPTIMIZING YOUR PRACTICE WITH 3D CONE-BEAM TECHNOLOGY - COURSE: 4140
2:40 – 3:40 Edward Ritz, DDS
IMPROVING PATIENT CARE WITH 3D CONE BEAM COMPUTERIZED TOMOGRAPHY - COURSE: 4150
4:00 – 5:00 George Freedman, Fay Goldstein and Edward Lynch
SOFT TISSUE LASERS AND CARIES DIAGNOSIS - COURSE: 4160

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 30
10:00 – 11:00 George Freedman, Fay Goldstein and Edward Lynch
SOFT TISSUE LASERS AND CARIES DIAGNOSIS - COURSE: 5110
11:20 – 12:20 Greg Diamond, DDS
LASERS IN PERIODONTAL THERAPY - COURSE: 5120
12:20 – 2:20 Day Almag, DMD
INTRODUCTION TO CONE BEAM CT (CBCT), ESPECIALLY AS IT PERTAINS TO PREVENTION OF FAILURES IN ORAL IMPLANTOLOGY - COURSE: 5130
2:30 – 3:30 Maria Pian, DDS, PhD
DETECTING CORONARY HEART THROUGH PERIODONTITIS AND PERIIMPLANTITIS - COURSE: 5140
4:00 – 5:00 Dwayne Karate, DDS
CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTS IN TOOTH RELACEMENT: PARADIGM SHIFT - COURSE: 5150

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 1
10:00 – 11:00 Mr. Ali Dube
BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICE, WASTE MANAGEMENT FOR THE DENTAL OFFICE, AND OSHA COMPLIANCE - COURSE: 6040
11:20 – 12:20 Glenn van As, DMD
HARD AND SOFT TISSUE LASERS - COURSE: 6070
12:45 – 4:45 Dr. Benjamin Rothstein, Dr. David Bensteiner, Dr. Jeffrey Hopper, Dr. Dwayne Karate, Dr. Eugene Merz, Dr. Sitan Parra
THE FIRST ANNUAL OSSED UNIVERSITY SUMMIT: IMPLANT DRIVEN DENTISTRY - COURSE: 6080

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have shown decreasing sales. We believe it is the situation in the market segments you are involved in.

The recession might have had devastating effects on companies offering upscale materials and equipment, but the situation in restorative and preventative dentistry looks far more promising. In the segments in which we are actively involved, such as prosthodontics, prophylaxis or dental cements, we have been able to achieve growth rates between 10 and 20 per cent.

Filling materials did not perform very well owing to increased market competition. There are plenty of new and innovative filling materials on the market right now and we have to invent a great deal in order to stay ahead with new developments and products.

What current trends have you observed in the industry?

All manufacturers are striving for a product that offers almost ideal properties for a filling material and exhibits the same physical properties as natural tooth substance. All our competitors are moving towards this ideal but we are far ahead. We have been working with nanotechnology since the early 2000s and based on the results of this product, our first nano-hybrid composite Grandio in 2003. This product is still in high demand in Germany and many other markets.

But we did not stop there. With GrandioSO, we are now able to present another nano-hybrid composite to the dental community that has outperformed our original expectations. In terms of its physical properties, it is probably the most tooth-like material on the market.

When and where will it be available?

It is already available in Germany and other selected European markets. Like its predecessor, GrandioSO is universally applicable but it is more translucent, so it can be used for restorations in the maxillary anterior region.

We will still offer Grandio to our customers worldwide. In the end, it is the dentists who decide which product they prefer.

Do aesthetics play a more prominent role in the development of a composite like GrandioSO?

The primary goal is function. There is a place for aesthetics too, but it must not compromise functionality or the stability of the filling. There are different points of view in dentistry regarding this matter right now but for us the primary goal cannot be highly opaque teeth that might be currently en vogue amongst Hollywood stars. In the US, for example, we found that dentists were using the white opaque shade of our flowable composite Grandio Flow for anterior restorations, as this is the typical shade of highly bleached teeth in the US. Normally, we recommend it only be used to whiten dark spots or in cases in which dentists absolutely need an opaque layer.

This is not the direction we wish to take. Teeth have a natural translucency and we want to keep it that way. I believe that with our current portfolio we offer dentists viable solutions to achieving long-lasting and natural aesthetic restorations.

Some European companies develop their products especially for the North American market. Do you do the same?

We sell exactly the same products in North America as we sell in Europe. Usually, most products are launched there six months after they have been placed on the European markets. The only difference is the type of shade. In Germany, for example, the majority of dentists use Shade A5.5, which does not play any significant role in markets like the US, where Shade A2 is more common.

Will GrandioSO be the main focus of your presentation at IDS next year and are you planning to introduce more products there?

GrandioSO will indeed be the main focus of our IDS presentation, but there are other products that we plan to launch this month and at IDS 2011.

Thank you very much for the interview.