"Foreign markets are very important to us"

An interview with Olaf Sauerbier, CEO of VOCO GmbH

_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. cosmetic **dentistry** spoke with Olaf Sauerbier, CEO and chief of Marketing and Sales, about new products and aesthetic trends in restorative dentistry.

Olaf Sauerbier (left) in talks with DT Group Editor Daniel Zimmermann.

_cosmetic **dentistry**: *The Association of Dental Dealers in Europe (ADDE) has recently predicted growth rates above three 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.

_Some segments in dentistry, dental implants in particular, have shown decreasing sales. What 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 prosthetics, 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 invest 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 I see us far ahead. We have been working with nanotechnology since the early 2000s and based on the results of this launched our first nanohybrid 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 nanohybrid 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 a little 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 VOCO's 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 A3.5, which does not play any significant role in markets like the US, where Shade A2 is more common.

Areal view of the VOCO headquarters in Cuxhaven, Germany.

_Will GrandioSO be the main focus of your presentation at IDS this 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 at IDS 2011._