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NSK aims for global leadership

A visit to the company's headquarters in Tokyo



• Eiichi Nakanishi, right, in talks with DTI Publisher and CEO Torsten R. Oemus.

■ It is no secret that the years since the global financial crisis have not been very kind to companies in Japan. First, the recession slowed business investments significantly down, then the negative effects of last year's tsunami and the massive destruction it wrought almost brought the world's third largest economy to a halt.

For NSK, one of the country's largest dental manufacturers, troubles in the home market are its least concern because the company conducts most of its business elsewhere. According to president and CEO Eiichi Nakanishi, with whom Dental Tribune International recently had the opportunity to speak at the company's headquarters in Tochigi, more than 80 per cent of the company's revenues are now generated by its operations outside of Japan. In the last three years, NSK has been performing particularly well in mature markets such as Europe and North America, where it boosted its presence with the opening of its new headquarters near Chicago last year, despite unfavourable conditions such as high market saturation and the ongoing decline of the yen against the dollar.

Since 2009, Nakanishi has also seen his company regaining its former market shares in Asia through centralised distribution and after-sales support offered by its new subsidiary in Singapore. Another significant contributor has been NSK's European office in Germany, which accounted for almost one third of the 22.2 billion Yen (\$278 million) in sales the company reported in 2011. "That is why economic conditions in our home market have little or no impact on our overall business. We really think globally," Nakanishi explains.

According to the 48-year-old, who has run the company since 2000, one of the major reasons for NSK's strong market position, even in established markets, is its dedication to innovation and quality, combined with the excellent after-sales service it is able to provide to customers in almost every country except North Korea. But this hasn't always been the case. Founded in the 1930s, the company had a rough start and operations were completely halted during World War II. Since the production of dental handpieces resumed in 1951, however, the company has grown exten-

sively and now employs more than 700 people in its Japanese offices in Tochigi and Tokyo.

NSK still produces most of the precision parts in-house, which, according to Nakanishi, is one of the reasons that dentists now identify the company with high-quality products. "We employ many good engineers and marketing people who help us to constantly improve our brand and make it more attractive to dentists," he says. One of NSK's recent innovations, launched at last year's IDS in Cologne, for example, is the Ti-Max Z series, a durable premium handpiece that is claimed to have the smallest heads and necks in the industry, as well as an exceptionally low noise level and virtually no vibration. The Surgic Pro surgical micromotor has also received much interest, particularly by dental implant surgeons, and is now distributed alongside systems by major implant manufacturers.



• NSK still manufactures most of the precision parts in-house.

NSK asserts it pays close attention to the needs of its customers, a philosophy that has resulted in products such as the S-max pico, which was developed solely for the treatment of patients with smaller mouths, such as children.

Moving into other markets is conceivable but unlikely to happen anytime soon, Nakanishi says. Even though his company has begun to enter new areas in the last decade with the launch of instruments such as ultrasonic scalers and polishers, its core business will remain dental handpieces and other small-motor equipment. "When it comes to handpieces, we have produced more innovations than our competitors," he remarks. "Our goal is to become the No. 1 company worldwide in this segment." ■

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