Thriving on all-ceramics, Ivoclar Vivadent prepares for the future

Dental Tribune International recently visited the company’s headquarters in Liechtenstein

W"ailed off by the majestic elevations of the Rätikon mountain range and the Appenzell Alps, several industrial hydraulic mixers are continuously at work. Every now and then, a worker brings new barrels filled with raw materials that are turned into a new compound that forms the base for IPS e.max blocks from Ivoclar Vivadent. Launched on dental markets for the first time seven years ago, the game-changing dental restorative system has earned Ivoclar Vivadent from the small European principality of Liechtenstein wide international acclaim as a provider of materials for highly aesthetic all-ceramic dental restorations. According to some industry sources, it has also defined the new gold standard in the field.

Comprising lithium disilicate glass-ceramic, zirconium oxide materials and veneering ceramics for the press and CAD/CAM techniques, it has an impressive clinical track record and has won the company a number of acknowledgements, including a Celebration of Excellence Award for Outstanding Innovation in Cosmetic Dentistry at the recent annual meeting of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry in Seattle in the US in June.

With double-digit growth last year, the materials, whose composition remains a well-kept secret, have also become one of the company’s most important drivers of economic success. Ivoclar Vivadent held an international expert symposium last year in Germany for the first time that was focused entirely on the system and the treatment results dentists are able to achieve with it in daily practice. According to Chief Sales Officer Josef Richter, the system still has much potential. “With IPS e.max, it is fair to say that we started a revolution in the field of fixed prosthetics, as it provides a highly aesthetic and durable solution not only for single-tooth restorations but also for far more complex indications, like three-unit bridges,” he recently told Dental Tribune International.

In addition to the high market acceptance of its posterior child product, Richter said that his company performed above the market average last year with its entire portfolio, including removable prosthetics and filling materials. Sales of clinical equipment and luting cements like Multi-link Autolink and Variolink II increased by over 10 per cent, he said, despite unfavourable conditions that make it more difficult for the company to operate in regions affected by the economic crisis, such as Southern Europe.

“Market reports from most of our offices show that fewer patients are currently visiting a dentist than potentially should, which is a matter of concern. As a result, we expect 2013 to be a difficult business year for the industry. However, expansion is still possible, if the market is growing slightly or at all,” he predicted. “Driven by our core business and innovations, our goal is to come out higher than the market average next year.”

Among the recent developments Ivoclar Vivadent launched this year is Tetric EvoCeram Bulk Fill, a further development of its nano-hybrid composite line, which the company says was designed with a powerful initiator for use with the bulk-fill technique and for tooth restorations in the posterior regions that are difficult to reach. It also introduced BioUniversal KFG, a golden, high-expansion universal casting for milling and the translucent crown technique suited to veneering low-melting special ceramics, for example. The IPS e.max CAD range has been expanded and now covers all possible indications, from light veneers to hybrid abutments and bridges with three or more units. To make it easier for customers to navigate their way through Ivoclar Vivadent’s extensive product offering, the entire portfolio was redesigned into three main categories: direct restoratives, and fixed and removable prosthetics.

The company has invested heavily in its infrastructure recently, with Euro 16m reported to have been spent on a new building expanding its headquarters in Liechtenstein, which is intended to increase storage capacity and house highest dental facilities where the latest developments are regularly put to the test under clinical conditions. Moreover, the manufacturing plants in nearby Bütsch in Austria, where Ivoclar Vivadent produces dental equipment, such as its Bluephase curing light, and in Amherst near Buffalo in the US have been expanded too. New sales offices and subsidiaries are planned in Russia and Ukraine, among other countries, a step that will expand the company’s already large reach in 120 countries. “A few years back, we decided to specifically target emerging markets, which now helps us to compensate for moderate growth in established regions like Europe or North America,” Global Region Head Asia/Pacific Christian Brutzer explained. “In India, for example, we have grown from only 10 people in 2009 to more than 80.”

According to Brutzer, the emphasis on increased local presence has not only facilitated growth in most of these regions, but also dramatically changed the way the company is perceived there. Education according to its own standards is considered a key factor for long-term development, a concept that has found its way into customer relationships through the establishment of International Centres for Dental Education, which are intended to offer training to existing and future customers through lectures and practical courses. Currently, the company maintains 25 of these centres worldwide, with the largest one in Schaan itself, where training laboratories are occupied almost around the clock by dentists and technicians from all over the globe. “All of our subsidiaries or sales offices currently provide some form of training. No other company in the market invests so much in education,” Richter said. “The increase in solutions available on the market has led to confusion among many customers of what is right for them,” he continued. “Therefore, we want our customers to understand the fundamental advantages that come with buying a product from us. In this respect, we see an opportunity to provide them with confidence and peace of mind.”