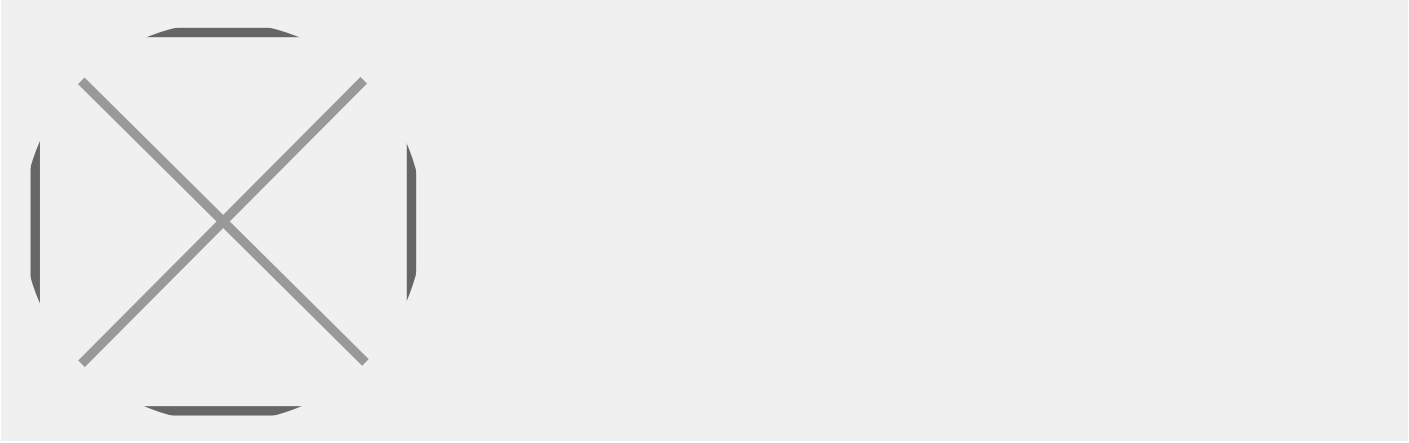
Interview with Alfred Grün, Managing Director, Schülke & Mayr Austria



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versary of Schülke&Mayr. There have been many changes over the years, but do you think the ideals and values of today reflect the original vision set out by the founders in 1889?

Generally, this is true. But of course, many things changed over the course of a century. Schülke has faced some challenges in recent years regarding the ability to create real innovative products, which has become more difficult due to EU regulations. Additionally, products have become closer and closer to competitors and the market is now more commodity-based.

What advice would you give to the authorities who create the regulations?

Firstly, harmonize the legislation. For example, hand disinfectant products are still a registered product in Germany, the only country where such a product is still registered. In other countries, such products are attached to the status of being a biocidal product. Harmonization on one hand is very good; on the other hand, exclusion from some countries is not ideal. Additionally, if you reduce the products only to the minimum on biocides, you are blocking innovation in this area. The restriction on the biocidal list is so hard that it becomes more and more difficult to find the right substances, and even if you have the right ones, the listing procedure for registration as a biocidal product costs a lot of money.

Being responsible for 42 countries, how important are the Austrian operations for the group on a regional level?

If you compare the sales per capita in Austria, we are the leading country in the Schülke group- by 40 percent more than the next country. This is as important as the mentality in Austria is very sensitive and flexible to be able to cover the Eastern European market successfully, which is a huge benefit for Austria.

Dr Richard Kwizda said that over the last ten years, Austria's role as a hub for companies has become somewhat obsolete. Do you think Austria will continue to serve traditionally as a hub for these businesses, or will it become less relevant in the coming years?

From the company's point of view, I am not afraid of the future. Based on our flexibility and mentality I think Austria will still have a very important role in the business for Schülke! From the Austrian point of view, I agree with Dr Kwizda; Austria has lost some positioning in terms of company decisions. There are a lot of companies that opened their own subsidiaries in the Eastern part of Europe, while the center of their export business has switched to Germany or other nearby countries.

What is the full scope of your portfolio here in Austria, and are there any particular products and services that you are excited about for 2013?

Every segment of the hygiene business has very solid products, and Schülke&Mayr's entire portfolio is very successfully present in Austria. Especially our wound antiseptic product OCTENISEPT which is one of the most requested products in this area. Our expectation for the next few years is still very positive, as it has been for the last ten years.

What are some of the partnerships that you have been involved with here in Austria, and why do they choose Schülke&Mayr over the competition?

Highlighting single partnerships is difficult because the company delivers to every hospital in Austria. Schülke's real advantages include the research and development of the business over the last century, as well as the very high standard of quality the company still follows – we not only have internal expertise about our products, but also external demonstrating Schülke's very high standard of quality. Schülke always has, and will have in the future, a very good relationship with its partners. Whenever the company can support its partners, it will. This can range from advising how to use products in hospitals or training and education. Schülke can also provide expertise on a subject at speaking events. The position of Schülke's clients is absolutely in the first row, and we try to fulfil all the demands and requirements of our clients to the highest level.

Hygiene regulations in Austria, particularly in the hospitals are extremely stringent. How do the regulations here compare with operations in other countries under your jurisdiction?

The farther east you go, the lower the standards tend to be. That is another advantage of Schülke's products; many of the practitioners or doctors in foreign countries were educated in the Western

world. In Eastern Europe and Russia, most professionals studied in Germany or Austria, so they are used to having a very high level of hygiene standard but cannot find the right products in their countries very easily. That is the advantage of using Schülke's products in these countries – professionals know can be sure to have the highest standard. I also believe that Schülke's high standard can serve as a role model for companies creating similar products in some Eastern European countries.

As President of IGEPHA, how have you been able to transfer your experience working here, into fulfilling the goals that IGEPHA wants to achieve, or vice versa?

As I have been with IGEPHA since 1989, Schülke is not the only reason why I am responsible for this association. The input I can give to IGEPHA is a thirty-year track-record in Austria in the OTC business. Additionally the international overview and experience of long-lasting memberships in international committees of the AESGP, the European association for the OTC industry allows me to contribute strategic advice to IGEPHA.

Given the difference between the German and Austrian working culture, to what extent is your business approach tailored to the Austrian environment in terms of your management style?

There are some countries whose management style is, in general, very strict and database-oriented. The Austrian way of managing is more of a mix between personal relationships, and data-based figures. The Austrian style is more focused on retaining good partnerships and always finding the right win-win solution. I sometimes feel this is missing in other countries. Germans, for example, tend to follow the figures. Business is discussed while always being careful not to disturb personal relationships between partners.

How have the last seven years as managing director lived up to your expectations, and what do you really want to achieve in the next two to three years?

Our goals have been more or less fulfilled in the last seven years. My targets for the next five years will be to stabilize the Austrian business into a smooth and steady development, which is important considering Schülke's high share of the total healthcare hygiene market. I will continue to keep the headquarters of the export business here in Austria, because Austrian mentality is the ideal basis for a successful and sustainable export business in the future.

What do you see as Austria's greatest role in the healthcare industry in the coming years?

Like everywhere in Europe also Austria is facing the problem of balancing the exploding healthcare-costs. To handle this challange in the best way it will need great efforts and high priority with the demand of creating the right concepts on the pharmaceutical side.

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