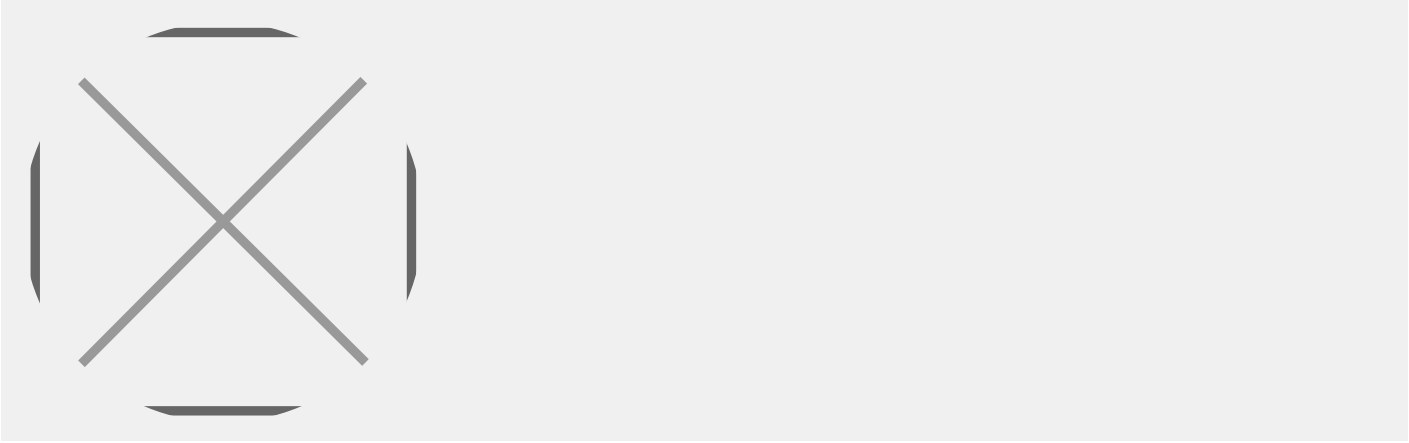
Interview with Orison Huerta, Managing Director Mexico, Central America & Caribean, Ottobock Mexico



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orison-huerta-managing-director.jpg

Can you give us a historical overview of the main milestones and achievements of Ottobock since it settled in Mexico in 1995?

Ottobock was founded in 1919 by Doctor Ottobock in Germany, after the WWI. He was trying to address the many amputations that happened during the war, and started to look for technology that could provide independency to the veterans who had been amputated and improve people's quality of life.

Until today the owners are still from the Ottobock family, we are now managed by the grandson of Doctor Otto Bock.

Innovation is at the core of the company values and they are investing up to 7 to 8 % of the global revenues in Research and Development. The Ottobock family also started thinking about a global company that could work in different countries.

So in 1995, Ottobock Mexico was founded as a subsidiary unit, slowly growing in a market that is not very developed locally. However there is a huge demand in Mexico regarding orthopedics and mobility. What Ottobock does as a market leader, is providing the maximum freedom to patients such as handicapped people after a neuromuscular, cardiovascular, brain disease, or an accident that led to an amputation or any kind of physical limitation to move and therefore, a loss of their ability to move. Mobility is our major focus in this market.

It is difficult to assess the size of our market in Mexico, because the statistics tend to vary. Government statistics assume that there are about 5 million people handicapped – including problems with ears, eyes, etc. However, those statistics are very low according to other non-profit organizations which assess that there are about 10 to 20 million people handicapped in Mexico. Around 50% of those disabled people have a problem related to mobility. Some were amputated or injured; others had congenital diseases that ended with a certain limitation of their abilities.

Our approach is very simple: we provide complete solutions to specific problems, either to the doctors, the end-user, the clinicians, etc.

The main challenge we face in Mexico is that handicap is not addressed properly by the authorities, mainly because of the way it is seen in the society and among families.

Mexico has never been recognized as a very innovative country in terms of technology so Ottobock developed an academy model where we are providing continuous education to the sector. This is one of the most valuable assets that we are providing to the market. We offer high quality and we are transferring knowledge into the market as they are very few professionals in this field. One of our programs is with the National University of Mexico, where we want to train enough staff and professionals to help us deliver our solutions.

We are also negotiating with the National Universities of Mexico, and with very several nonprofit organizations, as well as with the government, in order to raise awareness about certain problems. We want to change people's mind and prove that handicapped people have the right to be taken into consideration for economic activities. We want to show our government and institutions customers how important it is to rehabilitate disabled people to be productive again. We are launching a large awareness campaign through a special PR strategy by showing the problems we have as a country.

All those handicapped people are members of a family, which is the core of the Mexican society. When the father or the provider loses its ability to move for instance, it has a huge impact on the family cell.

At the end, what we are offering is autonomy and independence for the patient.

In Querétaro state for example, we work with some clinics for rehabilitation, (CRIQ), where we show them the impact of having good technology and how this can change the society at the end. We work with tools such as the index of quality of life, index of satisfaction, etc. Before our collaboration they were only buying very basic technology, but now they have been starting to invest in innovative technology that allow their patients to be able to walk or run again, and return to their activity. December 3rd is the national day for handicapped people, so there will be an official event with them and we are glad we were able to change their way of working.

That shows that when we manage to raise awareness, the market develops much faster.

Very often, even with equal skills, recruiters tend to avoid hiring handicapped people. How are you addressing this issue in Mexico?

I think our society is still not ready. Handicap is still shocking for people.

People need to understand that disabled people are normal, and they need to accept it. That's why the backbone of the problem is awareness: making people understand that it is not something strange or bad, and that it could happen to anyone. We want to show them that we are all equal no matter what physical problem some of us may have.

We need to reinforce and increase laws in favor of handicapped people. There would be small steps but if they are multiplied by thousands of other small steps in favor of handicap, then our society will make tremendous progress. At Ottobock we are taking this very seriously and we are already suggesting solutions and projects to Mexican politicians to solve those challenges.

The other issue about handicapped people working is that in most cases they have not been rehabilitated, or they do not feel comfortable enough to work, as some of them actually lost confidence. So this is also where we need to work: those patients need support from professionals to help them get back to the society.

How would you describe your value proposition to the Mexican market, especially compared to your local competitors?

It is very simple: our competitors are focused on selling products. We are focused on giving independence and autonomy to people.

Even compared to some international companies that have great technology, our value proposition is a human approach to our patient, with a unique goal of helping them get their freedom back.

There is a need for a holistic approach in this sector. And that is why we are developing our team in a very human way so they can also spread our philosophy: they need to feel part of this big success we are planning. We are creating big expectations and demand in this market. When we hire people here in Mexico we simply ask them "do you want to touch someone's life?" We have a very emotional message, because this is what it is all about. If there is an emotional link with our work, everybody will work with passion and everything will go well.

What is your final message to our readers?

In terms of market development, you have to set clear goals; Goals with an emotional content that may have an impact on someone's life.

Once you set those goals, the rest is about people.

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