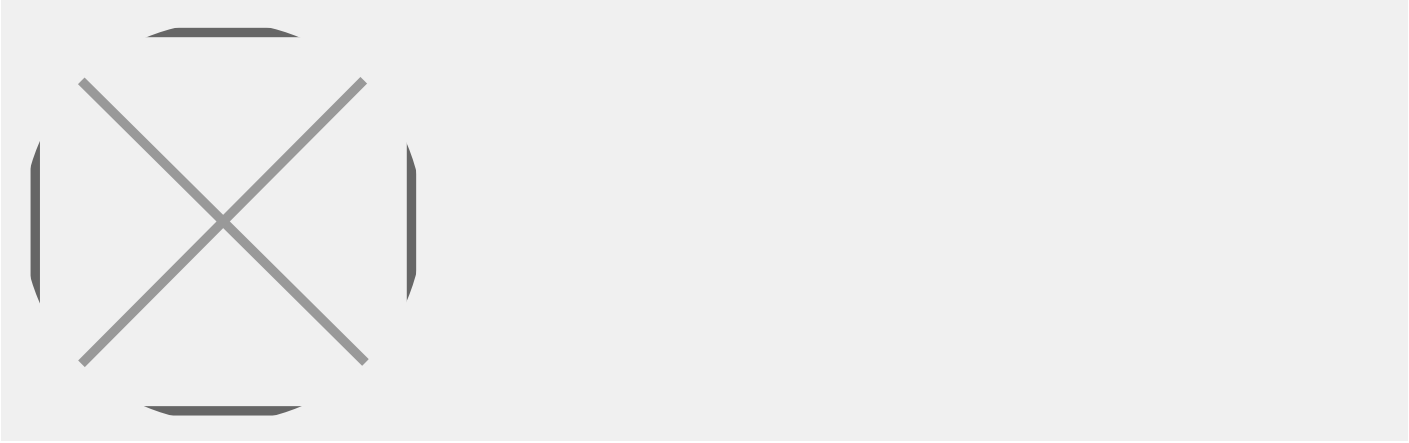
Interview with Ian Restall, General Manager, Metallform (Malta) Ltd



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Tags: Metallform (Malta) Ltd

Can you give us a brief description of Metallform's activity since the establishment of the Maltese subsidiary in 1992?

The parent company Metallform GmbH & Cokg was supplying disposable medical equipment to hospitals in West Germany through its subsidiary ImproMediform. When the Berlin wall came down in 1989 and Germany was unified, the market was suddenly much larger. In order to cater for this, they decided to look for somewhere where they could produce at lower prices than in Germany, but somewhere where they would not be jeopardising reliability. The obvious choice became Malta, so we started the plant in 1992 in order to serve the German and the Austrian markets, producing only for paediatrics. At the time we had 16 employees.

Since then we never looked back. The number of employees, the product range and the turnover has increased year in year out. Although Germany and Austria remain our biggest markets we are now supplying hospitals in various other countries like The Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Turkey. Our products are also distributed in the United Kingdom and to the whole Commonwealth: including South Africa, New Zealand and Australia.

Why was Malta specifically chosen for your subsidiary – it comes as a surprise that the island could compete with Germany's excellent reputation for precision manufacturing?

As far as I'm concerned I see this plant here as essentially an extension of the one in Germany. You'll have to be careful not to offend the Maltese with a question like that! Germans are renowned

for their quality and precision manufacturing and the Maltese are renowned for being obedient and very adaptable. We keep the highest standards and specifications and the best manufacturing practices as though we were in Germany, and we are audited by German company ECM.

The company has production in Germany as well as here. Metallform Malta prides itself on the fact that the quality is as good as it is in Germany. It is important with our business, with the kind of devices that we produce, that our employees work with passion. It is not very easy to do something that you have to do repetitively with passion.

How do you manage to attract and retain employees that have this "passion" given that human resources available to the healthcare industry in this country are limited?

I have tried to generate a good atmosphere at the plant. I think that this is important; regardless of the standards of the pay you offer, if people cannot come to work and smile, then you will not get the quality or this passion that is needed in order to maintain an efficiently functioning and successful plant. At Metallform we are proud of our employees.

We have 145 employees at the plant now, which will increase to 150 by the end of the year, and I can safely say our employees work with a passion: that is our secret. I don't even need to advertise when I'm looking for new staff – if the staff is happy, then they will work well and even end up recommending the work to their friends and family.

When the company first came to Malta how supportive was the government in the company's "industrial adventure", did they provide certain incentives and, looking back, are you happy with the group's decision?

First of all, we found producing here very fruitful. As I've said the employees are very efficient, the quality is excellent and the turnaround from order to supply is extremely good, so we are happy with that.

It's worth noting that of course Malta is more expensive than it used to be vis a vis labour force. However, if you don't look only at basic wages, but at overall cost, it is still cost-effective. This is because in this field the important thing is that you can produce quality first time and maintain this constant quality after that: you get this with efficiency.

In terms of government support, yes they were extremely supportive from the start. When the Chairman of the company came to Malta in February 1992 he had a meeting with the organisation that is now called Malta Enterprise (then known as MDC). They directed him towards some contacts and an accountancy firm. His next trip was in May when he employed me, and then operations begun on the 16th August of the same year. MDC helped Metallform in every step of the way, ensuring that the move was smooth. A point worth mentioning is the tax incentives for FDI in Malta at the time, ensuring ten year tax holidays.

The government has done well to create a hub for clean industries here in the Hal Far Industrial Estate. The estate has been very well developed, particularly in the past 10 years. That said, from a Maltese point of view, we are not here because of incentives but because of the creation of jobs.

What is your final message to the readers of Pharmaceutical Executive who are looking into investing in Malta?

My advice would be to come to Malta! It's very easy to operate over here, you have everything you could need and people are very helpful and not to mention loyal. That said, you have to make sure you like the island first as maybe it's not for everyone. So I think my advice would be to come here on an extended holiday – because then you'll know that you like it and if you like it, you'll stay, and if you stay you will be successful!

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