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SPECIAL WESTERN EUROPE

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No chance for damp

It can occur in any poorly ventilated house, no matter how grand or ordinary – mould, a result of moisture that can lead to serious health problems. According to the World Health Organisation a large number of cases of childhood asthma are caused by exposure to indoor damp and mould. The earlier the mould is detected and removed the better. Murprotec SA in France is a European leader in damp-proofing treatment.

Damp or mould in the house is never a pleasant discovery – but it is a common occurrence, especially in areas where moisture can come in from outside or in parts of a house where there is lots of excess moisture such as bathrooms. Excess moisture can be caused by leaking pipes, rising damp in basements or ground floors, or rain seeping in because of damage to the roof, walls or window frames. Murprotec has seen all different types of mould and damp and all different causes for the problem. The company is an experienced and leading provider of efficient damp-proofing solutions. “Murprotec was founded in 1954 in Great Britain,” says Director Jean-Claude Laporte-Riou. “The same year, the company obtained a patent for its damp treatment solution. There is no doubt that Murprotec has always been a pioneer in terms of solutions against damp.”

The effective solutions have been a winner right from the beginning – not only in Great Britain. In the mid-1970s, Murprotec started focusing on international markets and established a subsidiary in France, followed by Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Spain, Italy and Portugal. The European headquarters of the dynamic group is located in Brussels, while the French head office is based in Paris. Along with international growth the company became a producer itself, providing a warranty of up to 30 years on its exceptional treatments.

Today, the Murprotec Group has 450 collaborators and annual sales of 60 million EUR. In France, there are 76 agencies, 150 partners and revenues stand at 28 million EUR. The company’s success is

Murprotec’s anti-damp solutions come with warranties of up to 30 years

We have one distinct focus: we are specialists for anti-damp treatment.
Interview with Jean-Claude Laporte-Riou, Director at Murprotec SA

The result of a solution-oriented company approach. “We focus on three main areas,” sums up Mr. Laporte-Riou. “Dampness caused by condensation, capillary rising damp and penetrating damp. Our specialists work out solutions for every type of damp. To achieve exceptional results, correct diagnosis is crucial. We work out tailor-made solutions regardless whether we are dealing with damp walls, water in the basement or poor air quality. Customers greatly appreciate this versatility.”

Murprotec provides solutions for all kinds of houses and apartments from private homes to historical monuments; the company has fundamental know-how, works with state-of-the-art technology such as air purifiers and puts great emphasis on research and quality control. Customers such as private home owners, architects or real estate companies benefit from high quality services and direct contact – and often recommend the company further. “We sell directly to customers,” points out Mr. Laporte-Riou. “As there are no other distributors involved, customers benefit from attractive prices.”

Murprotec has long become Europe’s number one in terms of anti-damp treatment. 65 years of experience, more than 9,000 projects completed each year and more than 400 professionals in Europe make the company stand out. “We are a one-stop-shop for customers,” states Mr. Laporte-Riou. “We produce and sell directly and support customers from diagnosis to installation, production and after-sales. All of this has contributed to our reputation. Nevertheless, we put great emphasis on marketing to further enhance our popularity. We launch TV-spots, send mailings, we visit fairs and local events, are sponsors of a junior soccer team and consider a professional website to be vital.”

Providing outstanding products and services for the benefit of customers will always be Murprotec’s main challenge. Therefore, it constantly improves machines such as air purifiers. Besides, the company is going to strengthen its international presence and believes that Eastern Europe in particular offers great market potential. “I have been working with Murprotec for 13 years now,” says Mr. Laporte-Riou. “The company is a great innovator and it is still exciting to see that we are constantly developing new solutions that improve people’s quality of life.”

Murprotec will be present at the BATIMAT, Paris/Villepinte, from 2 November to 8 November 2019.

The company is widely recognized for its advanced solutions

Muroprotec will be present at the BATIMAT, Paris/Villepinte, from 2 November to 8 November 2019.
Building a more sustainable future together

The construction industry is always expanding and changing. Alongside the commercial building industry, the DIY sector has been steadily on the rise for over a decade. The Berdal Group, headquartered in the Netherlands, has been a leading producer, supplier and private-label specialist of synthetic and rubber-based products for the past 45 years. The firm is also active in the creation of a range of products that uses technical membranes and waterproofing construction membranes.

The three main target groups of the Berdal Group are the construction, ironworking and DIY industries. To better serve each sector, the company has divided its product portfolio into four distinct in-house brands. The first, Gripline, is very well-known across all three of the firm’s target groups for its buckets and tubs. There are many different variations within each category to choose from. “Differences in weight, handle type, shape and intended use are all things our clients can consider when choosing the product that fits their needs best,” says Eugène van den Broek, Commercial Director. Other than tubs and buckets, this line also includes rubber-based products such as, hammers, door stoppers, closet buffers, knee pads and more. In addition to its versatility, what makes Gripline even more sought after is its low environmental impact. All mortar tubs are made from 100% recycled, certified materials that have been sourced from plastic household rubbish. The buckets are made from 80% recycled materials and are not at a higher percentage simply due to having a steel handle.

The second in-house brand is Foliefol. Products in this range include things like building film, floor protectors, packaging products, tapes, damming film and others. In addition to being produced with high quality and safety standards in mind, this brand’s products are also very environmentally friendly. The sustainable and flexible construction membrane is made from recyclable polyethylene material. Using this material also means that it can be recycled again since the base product has so many applications.

Brand number three is Pandser, including Pandser Fast Flash – a unique second generation lead replacement line of products. This brand is great for roof, gutter and...
facade work. Since it is made from EPDM (synthetic roof rubber), it is a more sustainable option than many traditional water and wind proofing methods. “We also provide our customers who are interested in this line with instructional films, demo days, an online product environment and various sales support tools,” explains Mr. van den Broek. The business developed unique point-of-sales presentations that showcase the entire range in a 2 to 3 m wide shop concept.

However, the Pandser line is not the only category that receives value-added services. Data management is a huge service that is offered to clients who wish to purchase something from any of the brands. “Our clients ask for accurate and flexible data about each product,” states Mr. van den Broek. “By providing that, we support them in how they want to take care of their own business, for example using catalogues or e-commerce platforms.” Furthermore, all information is available in six different languages.

Finally, the fourth in-house line is Premiumfol. This product range consists of Berdal’s brand of EPDM strips and lead replacements for the DIY sector. It features a complete range of products with a long lifespan, which is what clients have come to expect from the company.

Other than creating its products from recycled and certified materials, the Berdal Group plans to take its sustainability mission even further. The company has already been certified by Der Blaue Engel organization, which is the first and most successful accredited environmental label worldwide. “We were also the only plastics company that committed to the ‘Plastics Pact NL’, which has the goal to produce 20% less plastic by 2025, and invest in more recycling initiatives and sustainable practices,” adds Mr. van den Broek. A second goal is to receive ‘cradle-to-cradle’ certification within the next six months as part of Berdal’s efforts to subscribe to the circular economy. This means that products are fully recyclable or produced from recycled materials.

Lastly, the business offers comprehensive logistics services. A smart calculation module has been developed, which helps businesses with various local branches and central warehouses keep track of their Berdal range of products in the best possible way.

With the motto of ‘Let’s build together’, the company proudly provides sustainable products to the construction, ironworking and DIY industries.
Platforms perfected with experience

When it comes to designing new tools, no one is in a better position to know what is really needed than someone who has actually been a hands-on exponent. This was the starting point for Pierino Bravi’s successful manufacturing firm BRAVIISOL D.M. S.R.L. Mr. Bravi spent over 20 years installing thermal and acoustic insulation, and understood the challenges of accessing high and hard-to-reach areas in comfort and safety. He started building mobile work platforms for his own use, before turning these into a commercial venture. Today, his platforms are in demand by customers across the world.

His first platforms were launched onto the market in the mid 1990s. “My initial focus was how I could increase worksite productivity and efficiency by working more safely and comfortably,” Mr. Bravi says. “It took a while. At the time, these platforms were mainly produced in the US and were, I have to admit, better than my first models. Today though, that has all changed. Our platforms are extremely strong and durable, and offer a high level of comfort. This positive development is due, above all, to the fact that I have always applied my first-hand experience as an installer, and as a result have succeeded in incorporating into our platforms the characteristics that operators really value – including comfort and the ability to work precisely.”

Headquartered in Castelfidardo in central Italy, BRAVI manufactures a wide selection of mobile work platforms and associated accessories. A highlight of the portfolio is the LEONARDO HD, a small, very manoeuvrable and highly practical machine, which can reach a height of 5 m and is ideal for working in confined spaces. “Our platforms are a far more comfortable and effective alternative to the ladders and podiums used in shops, supermarkets, warehouses and offices. BRAVI’s largest customer group is the rental sector, where its work platforms perfectly complement the usual range of access platforms. Around 95% of its products are exported; the company’s main markets are Northern Europe – in particular Germany, Benelux and Scandinavia – and the US. “We have succeeded in bringing innovation to the sector, and although it took time, the competition is now somewhat behind us,” notes the CEO. “I’ve heard it said that we have a completely unique vision for working platforms, and I believe this is down to my experience as a hands-on operator.”

With existing production facilities of 3,500 m² and a new unit of 2,000 m² shortly to be inaugurated, BRAVI is looking to double its current 15 million EUR annual turnover during the coming years. “We have to have a good ‘nose’ for what the market needs, and this has always been our advantage,” Mr. Bravi sums up. “The company is doing very well and will continue to do so. I believe in this company like a child believes in Christmas.”
New category available on European Business:

PRODUCT INTERVIEWS

Let’s talk about what makes you stand apart! Let’s talk about your products!
In our new category ‘product interviews’ we focus exclusively on the flagship-products of our clients.

air up
Fragrant air for flavoured tap water

Our heart of
All the magic takes place in the ring-shaped fragrance pod. When you suck at our bottle, you not only get clear water, but also scented air into your mouth. The fragrance is created automatically when you suck on our bottle. Air flows from the outside into the fragrance pod and there the air absorbs our natural aromas. The pod is filled with the best selection of natural flavors derived from real fruits, plants and spices. Each of our pods flavours at least five litres of water, making it 50 times more sustainable than most traditional soft drinks. In addition, it is of course fully recyclable and can be easily disposed of.
Source: www.air-up.com

How does it work?
Retronasal Smell
The ability to perceive smell through the mouth is known in science as „retronasal smell“. Smells are transported through the throat to the olfactory centre in the nose and then perceived by the brain as a taste.

How does man really taste?
You know this for sure: When you have a cold and your nose is too, the food usually tastes monotonous. This is due to the fact that up to 80% of our taste is created by smell or our olfactory centre. So it plays a key role for our diverse tastes.
Source: www.air-up.com

There are currently five different pods:

Orange-Maracuja
Peach
Lime
Apple
Lemon-hop
Source: www.air-up.com

Fabian, Tim, Lena, Simon and Jannis have developed air up because they have always been disappointed that healthy and sustainable products, especially beverages, are always accompanied by renunciation and high costs. They think that doesn’t have to be the case and want the most sustainable and healthiest beverage option to be the most attractive choice at the same time.
With this philosophy in mind, the founding team has already been able to inspire many, more talents and characters for the product and the idea behind the air up drinking bottle.
Source: www.air-up.com

Want to know how it might look like? Check out our feature of ‘air-up’.

Read more online
webcode: 8346
Interview with Federico Bonaventura, CEO, and Giovanna Malponte, Managing Director
at Sime Partecipazioni S.p.A.

Power – for today and tomorrow

Italy’s natural gas market is the third largest in Europe. Over recent years, the country has invested heavily in new infrastructure. At the same time, Italy is experiencing increasing demand for electricity generated from renewable sources. The Sime Group in Crema successfully operates in this competitive and challenging market. The energy provider considers diversification as one key to success.

The electricity market in Italy is undergoing a significant transformation, both in terms of structure and regulation. Due to an ongoing sector consolidation, it is dominated by a limited number of players. Furthermore, the government’s future policy goals include the implementation of structural solutions to increase competitiveness and bring prices and costs in line with European levels, support for renewables and energy efficiency measures and improvement in the security of energy supply. Sime Partecipazione embraces those challenges and is keen to make the most of them. “Sime is a well-established market player with a long history,” explains CEO Federico Bonaventura. “Its name is synonymous with stability and consistency. These characteristics make us stand out, as today many new players enter the market and start from scratch. We are interested in long-lasting customer relationships.”

Sime Polska – established in 2007 and Sime’s first and only international site

The group has continued to grow since then and now encompasses five companies and a total of 140 employees. In 2005, Sime Energia was established, a company that perfectly represents the group’s innovative spirit as it concentrates on renewable energy research and designs, manufactures and manages cogeneration and district heating systems. It runs seven cogeneration plants with traditional sources and four plants working with renewable energies such as biomass, photovoltaic and hydroelectric. Two years later, in 2007, Sime entered the Polish market through the foundation of Sime Polska. The company is responsible for the distribution and sale of methane gas in Poland and manages a pipeline of more than

Società Impianti Metano – synonymous with safety and efficiency in the gas distribution service

in 2002 we had to separate gas distribution and sales activities,” stresses Mr. Bonaventura, “Società Impianti Metano is currently active in gas distribution in 40 municipalities in northern Italy, while Simecom sells gas and electricity to 150,000 customers throughout Italy.”

SIME has a long history; its consistency and innovative spirit are important trademarks.
“When we got the chance to take over a project in Poland, this was a promising opportunity and we didn’t think twice about seizing it,” says Federico Bonaventura. “Poland has been a flourishing market and Sime Polska has grown along with the market.” In 2007, Sime established a further company; Zola Pedrosa Teleriscaldamento, a specialist in district heating that manages a plant of cogeneration and district heating for the municipality of Zola Pedrosa close to Bologna.

Under the umbrella of Sime Partecipazione, the group generates 160 million EUR. “Sime started as a small private company,” sums up Managing Director Giovanna Malponte. “We have successfully managed the transition from a small private company into a modern group with efficient structures. We successfully managed the transition into a modern and dynamic group with professional and efficient structures. The process mainly concerned the revision of the administrative and control organizational processes in SIME PARTECIPAZIONI, as group operating holding company. In Italy, the gas and electricity sales market is dominated by a limited number of really big players; then, there are medium-sized companies similar to us that have been deeply rooted in an area for a long time. Simecom for instance has 40 sales points which means that customers do not contact call centers but call us directly. This personal approach is extremely important to us. On the other hand, it is pivotal to continue growing and to keep pace with the market. We want to strengthen our position on the Italian market although we face many new challenges. Ultimately, our further development depends on different authorities and the government. Despite numerous uncertainties we are interested in partners who share our vision.”
Globalized and interconnected markets present opportunities for the democratization of technology. What does that mean? For BTC, it means bringing advanced technological solutions normally reserved for corporations, such as cloud-computing and mobile work platforms, to smaller and medium-sized firms in the Dutch market. Currently a major telecom reseller with a large client base in the Netherlands, BTC has brought in CEO Ray Kemp to mastermind an expansion into this new area. His plan has the potential to revolutionize not just the company, but small and medium-sized firms in the whole country.

“A huge gap is opening up for providers who can make cloud computing and mobile platforms available for small and medium enterprises (SMEs),” begins Mr. Kemp. “The benefits for SMEs are huge. Once everything is cloud-based, everything is flexible; think of the money and time that can be saved on commuting, and the boost in productivity to smaller enterprises throughout the Netherlands. It really is a race to be the first one to offer such a service.” Mr. Kemp has been at the company since January 2019, so he has had plenty of time to establish a strong working plan for the firm’s aim of reaching small and medium-sized Dutch businesses. “Our vision for this expansion is similar to the Greek myth of Prometheus. Just like the Greek hero, BTC has several assets that make it well placed to complete this task,” the CEO explains. “Even before I took on the role, it was easy to see that BTC was a well-established name, and had a unique opportunity to be the first to provide the IT services of tomorrow, due to its 2,500-strong client base of Dutch SMEs already using its telecom services.”

BTC was a well-established name, and had a unique opportunity to be the first to provide the IT services of tomorrow, due to its 2,500-strong client base of Dutch SMEs already using its telecom services.

The firm has historically been a provider of telecom services, so moving towards an IT managed service provider (MSP) has needed a strict timeline. “Since my January start, I have taken one month to thoroughly analyze the firm, and now we know where we are heading. We really want to be there in 18 to 24 months. This is combined with a buy-and-build strategy.” The company is a fairly long-term player on the market, at least for telecom, having been around since the year 2000. “Throughout that time, the business model has been rather static,” notes Mr. Kemp, “With such a long legacy, we understand that a lot has to be uprooted, and it’s important to timetable this. On 30th August, I headed a Management Buy Out (MBO). This means that the founders are now only shareholders and will also be part of the advisory board as of next year. I was brought in to bring the company up to date, which sometimes requires big changes in direction. It is really a major motivation for me to shape companies. My personal creed is: Keep IT simple.”

What will it look like on the other side? This was one of the first questions that Mr. Kemp looked to answer. “The real growth area is in full-service provision, so connectivity will remain part of it,
but no longer as the focus. We will reach the point of integrating connectivity with software using APIs, and offer offices the opportunity to be fully cloud based. You could say that currently we are offering the ABC of connectivity with our telecom services. We hope by the end of our expansion to be able to offer A-Z like an MSP,” he explains. For the CEO, at the end of this expansion the firm needs to be able to offer SMEs on the Dutch market connectivity, cloud-computing, and software development.

“It sounds easy enough, why hasn’t this been done already?” Mr. Kemp ponders. “We have come to realise that education is a really important part of our future direction as an outreaching company. Many businesses don’t have the expertise to understand what this technology could do for them. It’s something currently only large corporations, which have the time to invest in training their staff, can do. That’s why our philosophy has to be not just about giving the customer a new product, but also offering our expertise. This is what will help us succeed in previously untapped markets.”

As well as being proactive in outreach, there is an extent to which BTC is also setting itself up for the inevitable. “From talking to our clients, we have pinpointed that the future of their connectivity and IT systems is a huge issue and one they are already thinking about, because soon telecom operators will be discontinuing the servicing of legacy systems, and computer service providers are doing the same,” notes Mr. Kemp. As a company, BTC sees a huge potential market among these SMEs. “It’s going to become more necessary as time goes on, so it’s a win-win for us all,” the CEO adds.

Introducing a top-level technology to smaller companies can win their loyalty and empower them to achieve more. This is something BTC understands as it looks to evolve from a company in the telecom industry, where margins are slimming year on year, into an exciting new frontier with many applications. Under Mr. Kemp’s thoughtful leadership, this expansion will not only revolutionize small businesses in the Netherlands, but put BTC in a dominant position and enable it to gain a greater market share.
How to modernize a country

Fibre networks are the future in delivering high-speed broadband services for the Internet of Things, video streaming and other, increasingly data-intensive applications. Viken Fiber AS, a Norwegian fibre pioneer, has been laying fibre cables for the past 14 years and with its advanced technology, the company is challenging the traditional providers and enhancing Norway’s modernization.

Viken Fiber has managed to turn the cost-intensive digging and cable laying into a profitable activity enhancing Norway’s digitalization.

We are the fibre leader in Norway.

Viken Fiber is Norway’s largest fibre company, building and operating fibre glass networks and providing broadband services, in cooperation with Altibox, across wide areas of eastern Norway. Based in Drammen, the capital of the county of Buskerud, the most populated part of Norway, the company has been building fibre networks since 2005. “Already in 2004 we had the idea to develop the digital infrastructure and provide households and businesses with high-capacity, broadband network access points,” says CEO Anne Berit Rørlien. “Our focus was on being a challenger in the telecommunications market. For this purpose, we started a pilot project in a limited region around Oslo and equipped 500 households with fibre connections. The pilot was highly successful, despite the high costs for the cabling. Many market participants did not believe in the project, but we demonstrated that the future lies in fibre networks and that a significant return on investment is possible within a very reasonable time.” After the successful pilot, Viken Fiber rolled out its fibre network initiative further and went from door to door. Soon, the company was able to win 20,000 fibre clients. “In 2013, five companies from the sector merged...
and created today’s Viken Fiber,” explains Ms. Rørlien.

Viken Fiber is owned by four utility companies – Lyse Fiberinvest, Glitre Energi, Lier Everk Holding and Hadeland Energi – and has branch offices in Oslo, Porsgrunn, Grålum and Hønefoss. “We are still a regional player concentrating on the eastern parts of Norway,” states Ms. Rørlien. Viken Fiber currently delivers broadband services for the Internet, television and telephone to more than 180,000 customers in over 70 municipalities. The company employs 110 people and has annual revenues of 1.5 billion NOK, or approximately 146 million EUR. Viken Fiber specializes in Fibre-to-the-Home (FTTH) connections and manages the laying of the fibre-optic cables in every region the company is developing. “The laying is very cost-intensive,” explains Ms. Rørlien. “Therefore, the rate of new subscribers has to be at least 50% in a defined area to make the investment pay off. Today, the connection rate is usually much higher, though, between 62 and 74%.” To this date, Viken Fiber has laid over 5,000 km of fibre-optic cables, which is about twice the length of Norway from top to bottom. Viken Fiber plans every new cable laying project and for the actual digging and laying the company works together with experienced, reliable subcontractors.

As the fibre glass pioneer and market challenger, Viken Fiber is competing with the traditional broadband providers in Norway. “As the building of a fibre network is very costly, the established providers had no interest in entering this market segment,” states Ms. Rørlien. “This way, we have developed into the fibre leader in Norway. There are other companies like us in the country. But the second-largest has only about 80,000 subscribers. So we are the undisputed number 1. We strongly believe in fibre as the future of broadband network infrastructure and have found a way to make it a profitable technology in spite of high investment costs. This applies to urban areas with its many concrete areas, which make cable laying expensive, and for rural areas with their often very long distances. But we are convinced of our concept and willingly accept the challenge. And we have very efficient processes and in-depth expertise. Our success and reliable work speak in favour of us.” Another strong point of Viken Fiber is its tried-and-tested partnership with the content provider Altibox. “For the tenth time in a row, we have been jointly elected Norway’s best network provider,” says Ms. Rørlien. Viken Fiber won first place in the coveted Customer Satisfaction Award rating organized by EPSI Norway, a European leader in stakeholder management and benchmarking.

Besides supporting data-intensive broadband applications, including the Internet of Things, Viken Fiber is enabling future-oriented concepts like smart cities, integrating high-speed mobile broadband technologies. “We also plan to engage more in data centers and connect them to our high-speed fibre networks,” explains Ms. Rørlien. “In addition, we want to participate in the building of the modern 5G mobile telecommunications network, which is also based on fibre infrastructure, and expand geographically and acquire additional subscribers beyond eastern Norway. There is a lot of potential. The market is far from being saturated, and with our technology, we are making a contribution to the modernization of Norway.”

We are contributing to the modernization of Norway.
Vision loss can affect people of all ages – and can change life dramatically. Often, it has a significant effect on everyday life, and patients experience continuous mental stress due to worries, anxiety, or fear of consequences such as depression or social isolation. Retinitis pigmentosa (RP) is a progressive degenerative disease of the retina that can lead to blindness. Now, Okuvision GmbH from Reutlingen is giving hope to patients suffering from RP. The company has developed OkuStim®, a system that offers the chance to slow down the progression of RP.

The human senses are our connection with the environment. The eyes are considered by far the most important of our sensory organs. Up to 80% of all impressions are perceived through our eyes. The complete loss or the deterioration of eyesight can feel frightening. For this reason, OkuStim is gaining increasing interest from patients who put their hope in this innovative therapy system.

Okuvision is the company behind OkuStim; its ambitious goal is to slow down the progressive loss of vision in hereditary retinal diseases and to maintain people’s quality of life. Since June 2019, Okuvision has been operating as an independent company; it was previously a subsidiary of Retina Implant AG, a company that concentrated on the development of retinal implants that can restore a certain degree of vision in patients who have become blind from retinitis pigmentosa. Retina Implant was founded in 2003 with the great vision to develop a treatment for the previously incurable disease retinitis pigmentosa. Thanks to intense research and development, it successfully developed a subretinal implant able to restore partial sight to people who receive little or no light due to various forms of degenerative retinal diseases. The implant features 1,600 photodiodes and stimulation contacts that partially replace photoreceptors destroyed by the retinal disease. In 2016, the relevant chip Alpha AMS was awarded CE certification and received outstanding international recognition.

Despite its ground-breaking therapy concept, Retina Implant’s story ended this year. “Unfortunately, due to bureaucracy and laborious approval procedures, Retina
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Okuvision relies on electrical stimulation therapy; electrically stimulating the retina can help preserve dying retinal cells

Implant is currently in the process of liquidation,” explains Okuvision CEO Dr. Alfred Stett. “At the end of the day, the company could not meet the rightfully high expectations. Luckily, we have found an investor and are now in a position to open up an exciting new chapter and to further ensure the supply of the OkuStim therapy system. With ten employees, all of them former members of Retina Implant’s staff, we are thrilled to make a new start. It is our aim to have lean structures to keep flexible and dynamic. As a first step, we are going to promote the system throughout German-speaking Europe; in the next step, we will focus on the rest of Europe before concentrating on China and the Arab region.”

OkuStim is a treatment for retinitis pigmentosa whose efficacy and safety have been proven in clinical studies. The therapy can slow down the progression of the disease and thereby preserve vision for longer by stimulating the retina with weak electrical pulses. “We work with transcorneal electrical stimulation, TES,” says Dr. Stett. “This form of therapy can be beneficial for patients suffering from hereditary vision loss. One in 4,000 people are affected by retinitis pigmentosa; across Europe, 120,000 people are affected by this disease that often leads to blindness. For this reason, we are keen to relaunch Okuvision and continue marketing OkuStim.”

OkuStim is designed to promote cell protection in photoreceptors and slow down progressive sight loss in retinitis pigmentosa patients by stimulating the eye with TES. A weak electric current is used to stimulate the retina. The device consists of a frame worn around the patient’s head, a hand-held stimulation controller with integrated power supply and disposable electrodes. Patients need to apply the therapy once a week for 30 minutes. One of its great advantages besides its efficacy is that patients can self-administer OkuStim at home. Some of the costs are covered by health insurance. “OkuStim was CE approved when we were still part of Retina Implant,” points out Dr Stett. “Now, it is important to obtain a new approval. We are going to embark on new clinical studies with the aim of delivering more evidence of the therapy’s benefits so that, in the future, health care payers reimburse the whole expenses related to the therapy.”

The basic idea of OkuStim is that electrical current is sent to stimulate the retina
From gene to vial and from clinic to market

Independent family-owned company Rentschler Biopharma SE is proud of its incredible 90-year history in the production of pharmaceuticals. During the early years, the company gathered extensive experience through the development of over-the-counter and prescription medicines. In 1974 it was one of the first companies to enter the brand-new field of biotechnology, and since 1997, the high-end technology provider has focused exclusively on the development and manufacturing of biopharmaceuticals without having an own product line thus being able to be fully dedicated to high end service business. Headquartered in Laupheim in southern Germany, Rentschler Biopharma today fulfils contracts worldwide.

“Rentschler Biopharma develops and manufactures products exclusively on behalf of its customers, and is among the five largest contract development manufacturing organizations (CDMO),” explains CEO Dr. Frank Mathias. “Thanks to our huge number of competent employees with impeccable credentials in biotechnology who are passionate about their work, we find solutions where others don’t even look.” Rentschler Biopharma is a renowned specialist: It collaborates with its clients as their solution partner and provides flexible service. “Rentschler Biopharma is one of the very few firms to genuinely focus on developing and manufacturing biopharmaceuticals exclusively for customers,” underlines Senior Vice President for Business Development Federico Pollano. “We do not create internal competition. Instead we consider our customers to be partners because of the close cooperation that is necessary.” This is not Rentschler Biopharma’s only competitive advantage. “Our dedicated staff do not fear complexity and continue working where others would perhaps give up,” says COO Dr. Ralph Otto. “We have significant experience, and have processed more than 250 projects worldwide.” Rentschler Biopharma offers an end-to-end service, covering the whole value chain from gene to vial, from clinic to market. The Rentschler family remains involved in the company. Prof. Dr. Nikolaus F. Rentschler is Chairman of the Supervisory Board, which means that decisions can be made quickly, efficiently and, most importantly, based on a long-term perspective.

The pharmaceutical industry is still pursuing solutions for many diseases. “There is always scope to understand the causes of diseases better and thus offer very specific solutions,” explains Dr. Otto. “Complex molecules can specifically intervene in certain biochemical processes in the body. These are like adapted an-
tibodies, so they are much more specific than chemical molecules. In trials, between one in seven and one in ten biopharmaceuticals are successful, whereas only one in 20 chemical pharma products are approved.”

Rentschler Biopharma is located in Laupheim, where it employs around 800 staff and undertakes both production and fill & finish. However, changes are ahead: The company is preparing to move its fill & finish activities to the new state-of-the-art plant of Rentschler Fill Solutions in Rankweil, Austria. “In recent years, we have focused primarily on product development and production, and clinical trials. Since this has been very successful, we are now looking at other activities,” says Dr. Mathias. “We grow with our customers. Because we offer tailored solutions, up to 3,000 l bioreactors, we are well positioned to cover the area of rare diseases, where focused batches are needed.” Federico Pollano adds, “Personalized medicine is the current market trend. In this segment, we are incredibly innovative.”

Rentschler Biopharma is still growing fast, well above the general market rate. “This is because our customers are satisfied with our service and continue to come back to us,” Dr. Mathias points out. Nevertheless, the company has a strategy in place to ensure its incredible growth trajectory is sustained. “We have implemented Strategy 2025,” reveals Dr. Mathias. “The company is, without a doubt, currently very successful, but we want to ensure long-term competitiveness. Of course, we first had to think about what the world will look like in 2025. We have discussed this intensely with many different parties, internally and externally, and our vision is based on this research: a worldwide operating, independent family-owned firm with flexible end-to-end solutions typically exceeding our clients’ expectations by working in close partnerships and being open for new business models.” Dr. Otto sums up, “We have been around for 100 years, and we will be here for at least another 100.”
A pharmaceutical company which genuinely puts patients at the forefront of its activities: Sadly a rarity in this day and age, but nevertheless, such organizations do exist. Italian biotech and pharmaceutical firm BIOVIIIx Srl is a perfect example of how a company can respect patients’ needs, and those of its partners, suppliers and employees, and at the same time develop a successful business. BIOVIIIx specializes in the field of blood disorders and rare disease, with a particular focus on hemophilia.

The company was founded in 2013 by Dr. Davide Rosiello, who was motivated by a number of factors which he considered lacking in the pharmaceutical sector. “I had worked in the biotech sector for 25 years, and recognized that although the big pharma concerns claimed to focus on patient needs, that was often not the case,” he says. “I wanted to create a firm with a strong human element, to really get close to patients’ problems. Our philosophy is about creating a balance between social engagement and financial necessity. For example, it may be difficult to get medication to a patient in a particular country. We will deliver in such a situation, even if the cost of delivery is more than the cost of the drugs, to ensure that the patient is taken care of.” Another aspect of large-pharma culture which concerned Dr. Rosiello was the lack of discussion between scientists and hospitals. “We spend a huge amount of time on the education of our staff; they are renowned for their knowledge of products and therapies, and have extensive contact with the clinics,” adds the Managing Director.

BIOVIIIx specializes in hemophilia and other rare blood disorders. The company began by selling hemophilia products made by pharma concern Baxter (today Takeda) which had, at that time, not been commercialized. Some of the profits were invested in research; BIOVIIIx has now secured three international patents – one in the area of coagulation, and two in hematology oncology – and is in the process of establishing its own R&D facility. The company has created several start-ups to undertake research initiatives in collaboration with a number of Italian and British universities. 3P Sense Ltd was created in 2015 as a research venture with University College London, and has patented solutions relating to fast and precise diagnosis in coagulation and oncology. Oncovix is a collaboration with the University of Catania, specializing in research and product development relating to pancreatic cancer; its Duo Fix Combination, which was patented in 2017, is currently undergoing clinical studies. IT Health Fusion is BIOVIIIx’s sales division, which supplies hospitals and research centers with...
BIOVIIIx has recently established a new start-up, Ambition, which is developing patented anti-tumour drugs relating to the suppression of angiogenesis, a typical characteristic of tumours. A new collaboration with the University of Glasgow to undertake another diagnostic project is about to be launched. All of BIOVIIIx’s patented medications are blockbuster drugs, meaning they have the potential to generate sales of over $1 billion.

In line with the large pharma concerns, BIOVIIIx also offers a range of services such as home care, physiotherapy and dental support services, designed to meet the specific needs of hemophiliacs and patients with other blood disorders.

BIOVIIIx currently only operates in Italy, however the company is looking to expand its activities within Europe. While the large pharma concerns dominate the market, they cannot compete with BIOVIIIx in respect of its patient focus and human approach. “My motivation is not money, but the patients who were being let down by the industry through the lack of development in the area of hemophilia, as well as the 25 families who rely on BIOVIIIx for their livelihoods,” says Dr. Rosiello. “This is a big responsibility. Research into blood disorders has really captured my heart, and my ultimate goal is to improve the quality of life of every patient, through solid data and solutions rather than marketing.”

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BIOVIIIx current differentiates itself from the large pharma concerns through its focus on patient care and social engagement.

The company is in the process of setting up its own research and development facility to further its quest to provide solutions for rare blood disorders.

Close contact to hospitals and clinics: BIOVIIIx’s staff are renowned for their knowledge of products and therapies.
The second phase of a winning start-up

Disrupting well-established markets, such as healthcare, often requires pioneering for innovative technologies. That is exactly what Echosens has done with FibroScan®, its flagship liver health product. Developed from the PHD research of founder Laurent Sandrin, Echosens non-invasive diagnostics and monitoring technology has radically improved and simplified the diagnosis of liver health. But how is a successful start-up leveraging its growth beyond its revolutionary flagship product? For new CEO Sven Henrichwark, the key has been taking a fresh look at why the firm has flourished, and what made it great in the first place.

“Echosens’ products have become successful globally in a very short space of time, with currently 40% of sales in the US, 40% in Europe and 20% in Asia,” reports Mr. Henrichwark, CEO of the firm since June 2018. “The core reason is that FibroScan® radically simplifies the monitoring of the liver, is cost effective, and the results are easy to interpret and communicate to the patient. An examination takes three minutes and you don’t need a special qualification to do it. It’s the perfect product for a time when healthcare systems are looking to become better and be more efficient, and where patients want to make informed decisions about their health.”

The company’s fundamental ability to continuously innovate is what the CEO has identified as being central to the firm’s competitive advantage. As Mr. Henrichwark explains: “Keeping the focus on research and development has been key to our success. Having our founder Laurent Sandrin as our CTO is key to preserving our innovative start-up DNA in R&D, continuously broadening the applications of FibroScan®. That has allowed us to move beyond an initial clinical research focus to become a key player in identifying and monitoring liver disease caused by Hepatitis C. That was a real turning point in raising FibroScan®’s profile as powerful technology in the medical community.”

This leads Mr. Henrichwark to the next level for the company: a focus on the US and the NASH market. “FDA approval for Echosens took nine years in total, despite having over 1,000 peer-reviewed publications. We were rewarded for our persistence and, after approval in the US in 2013, sold something like 1,000 instruments within two years. Our US business has been a primary driver of growth ever since but there is still plenty of room to grow our installed base.”

“Maintaining the start-up spirit of the firm allowed us to stay open to learning continuously about...
drivers of growth for our products and technologies” begins the CEO. “The company is much larger now, but in order to build on our success, we always need to remember that this made Echosens successful in the first place. For instance, it’s this ambition to constantly develop FibroScan® technology further and expand geographically that has led our China subsidiary to develop, manufacture, and sell products specifically for the Chinese market.”

Geographically, one market that is still proving particularly tough is Germany. “The US healthcare market is internally competitive and our products give doctors a competitive edge in their markets. That made it easier to establish ourselves as a leader and standard of care more quickly. In markets such as Germany, which is less internally competitive and is more radiology centric, it’s more a case of ‘what have we worked well so far so why change?’ FibroScan®’s clinical relevance is making an impact in Germany, just more slowly. When you break into nationalized healthcare markets, you do need more time to get in, especially as a smaller company. Once accepted, you can more quickly proliferate nationally, so it’s a real ambition of ours,” notes Mr. Henrichwark.

On the future of FibroScan®, the CEO has identified three areas of growth: “Our biggest focus is being the NASH patient identification and monitoring platform of choice. NASH is a multi-billion dollar market and our technology is uniquely well placed to meet that market’s needs. Secondly, entering the primary healthcare market with a new generation of easier-to-use FibroScan® is a particular point of need and interest; this will happen within the next two years. Thirdly, we are integrating FibroScan®’s numerical outputs for liver stiffness and fat content with other biomarkers, such as AST, to develop algorithms that are precise and specific yet simple to understand for NASH patient identification and monitoring.”

Under Mr. Henrichwark’s leadership, this mature enterprise has kept at its heart the flair and courage it possessed as a small startup in the 13th arrondissement of Paris. It is about taking nothing for granted, and looking forward to the next phase.

Echosens employs 250 staff globally. Over 50% are based in the US, with offices in Lebanon, Germany, Spain, Hong Kong, China, and its Paris headquarters.