Transforming
by Benjamin Lund, Editor, Dentaltown Magazine

Standing from left: Heraeus Kulzer President Christopher Holden, Vice President of Sales and Marketing Mike D’Errico, Director of Product Development Sonny Serreno, Director of Dealer Relations/National Accounts George Romero, Director of Marketing Nicole Turner; Seated from left: Senior Business Development Manager Ana Quilliman, and Director of Sales Dennis Dalton.
Heraeus reinvents itself to present more aesthetic solutions to doctors and patients, as well as developing a much stronger sense of corporate responsibility.

Heraeus is certainly a company of firsts. The $15 billion, family owned company began in Germany more than 150 years ago and was the first company to commercially melt platinum to be used in an industrial setting. This advent birthed several companies, including dental, which succeeded in bringing dental alloys to the market. In the 1930s, Heraeus invented dental acrylics, and later, invented the first microfil composite. Heraeus Kulzer, the dental division of Heraeus, continues to drive this culture of innovation.

“There are a whole host of innovations that Heraeus has invented over the years that I’ve been made aware of since I’ve been here, that even I’ve said from time to time, “We made that first?” says Heraeus Kulzer President Christopher Holden. “I am certain there are some people within our own organization who aren’t aware of these significant moments Heraeus has been a part of.”

Today, the company continues with its tradition of firsts. Most recently, Heraeus is the first company to link composites and porcelain under the same brand, Venus®. This brand is very much in tune with the company’s mission of being considered the most aesthetic dental company in the profession. Heraeus is also one of the first companies in the profession to use its resources to impact the greater community through charitable work and environmental programs. Simply put, Heraeus is all about transforming lives.

Heraeus, in Reality

Heraeus, better known in the dental profession through its Venus, iBond®, Flexitime®, Gluma®, Ivory® and Agfa® products, offers exceptional diagnosis, treatment and care for cosmetic direct and indirect restorations. But originally the company started out in the precious metals business, servicing many different arenas, according to Stefan Klomann, vice president of marketing and communication. Klomann says that in Germany, the biggest misconception is that Heraeus is still only a precious metals company. Heraeus, the parent company of Heraeus Kulzer, has divisions in aerospace, automobiles, chemistry/pharmaceuticals, lighting, medicine, semiconductors/electronics, steel and telecommunications. It currently employs more than 11,000 people including 1,600 employees in the dental division – a far cry from a mere precious metals company.

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“It is an advantage for our dental division to work with so many people, which demonstrates a high commitment to cutting edge technology,” says Klomann. “In regards to the dental field, we are already offering a diverse portfolio of products globally. We might offer a new product in the United States, and then launch in other countries, depending on market opportunities.”

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Aesthetics

One of Heraeus’ newer U.S. product line offerings was announced in June 2007 when it introduced its next generation aesthetic solution, the Venus Smile, making it the first dental manufacturer to deliver a fully integrated aesthetic restoration that encompasses both direct composite solutions and indirect porcelain solutions. Venus originated as the demand from consumers for aesthetically pleasing and natural looking restorations soared.

“Aesthetics is more than what’s driving our profession,” says Holden. “It’s demanded by patients. At the end of the day, it’s hard to meet someone who says, ‘I don’t want to look good.’ It’s something we all want to be part of. For us not to understand that would be missing the mark.”

The key to Venus restorations are laboratories called Venus Smile Centers, which are required to meet the highest end of qualifications relative to the output of prosthetic work, according to Holden. Venus Smile Centers meet regularly scheduled audits and Heraeus offers training by high-end cosmetic technicians to ensure that there is a continuous flow of proper training to these centers. Heraeus provides that at no charge to its partners. Participating partnered labs are considered on case by case basis, depending on Heraeus’ qualifications. The first Venus Smile Center was deployed at Dental Arts Laboratories, Inc., in Peoria, Illinois. Heraeus’ intent is not to compete with its customers; rather, the company’s goal is to empower its partners to collectively represent the highest level of aesthetic service and quality workmanship, delivering the ultimate in patient satisfaction.

“In this industry, we’re the first company that’s put a flag in the ground and said, ‘We’re the most aesthetic company.’ And we’re putting a flag in the ground, saying we have the most aesthetic brand, Venus, which, objectively speaking, we do. Venus will allow a patient to understand what a practice is all about. The doctor and the staff will be in tune with what it is they’re presenting. The goal is to help raise the level and quality of dentistry that’s being performed and allowing the dentist to share in the economic benefit. Venus is an all-encompassing aesthetic solution,” says Holden.

“Our new aesthetic approach has lent itself to representing a more consumer-friendly presence for Heraeus,” says Vice President of Sales and Marketing Mike D’Errico. “At trade shows, for example, we offer an open floor plan. It’s inviting; people can come in and sit and feel a part of what we’re doing. Ultimately, we want to sell, but not without developing a strong relationship with our customers. My sales philosophy is to service our customers while providing long-term solutions. Our aim is to be a complete resource to the entire dental team.”

Education

One of the highlights of the past 18 months is the new way Heraeus is helping dentists receive continuing education (CE) content, earn CE credits and access information. In a joint initiative with the National Dental Network, Heraeus unveiled a customized version of the video iPod® that comes preloaded with several types of CE – from live patient, step-by-step clinical demonstrations, to cutting-edge practice management, to product information and updates. The iPods are provided free to Heraeus customers who purchase qualifying dental or laboratory products.

According to Mike D’Errico, vice president of sales and marketing, the Heraeus podcast is part of a continuing educational process, so that those who have already purchased the iPod promotion can synchronize their video iPods as new content is published. Heraeus will continually update its iPod offerings – be it in the realms of education, products or even corporate messages to keep users informed about what’s new with the company.

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“This has been long in the planning stages and the reception of it has been truly amazing,” says Holden. “The exciting part has been in the realization of how meaningful this new educational endeavor is to our customers, as providing education is mission critical. We understand that dentists are inundated with educational opportunities, but they all involve some level of travel. The opportunity to have education in the palm of your hand at your own convenience is paramount to being able to learn in a more efficient way.”

According to Holden, the future of the company’s iPod offerings has a few more surprises to come. Heraeus’ focus is to continue to enhance the video podcasts with even more creative, shorter time-span formats for dental professionals.

Corporate Social Responsibility

There is more to the company than simply selling dental products and providing CE – Heraeus is a company that cares. With the kind of worldwide success Heraeus has achieved, the company has committed itself to use its many resources to give back to the community and impact those who need the most aid.

Heraeus recently partnered with the National Children’s Oral Health Care Foundation (NCOHCF) to provide underprivileged children nationwide with access to dental care. According to NCOHCF, there are an estimated four million American children nationwide who suffer from dental problems so severe they have difficulty eating, sleeping and even learning. NCOHCF’s goal is to eliminate pediatric oral disease and promote overall health and well being for those disadvantaged children through a cooperative effort of leading dental companies, associations, educators and practices who provide support through monetary and product services.

“It’s not fair to those who cannot afford a beautiful smile,” says Holden. “Our social platform really surrounds children and most of our donations go to NCOHCF. We’re really committed to that organization. We’re an underwriter and a sponsor, which means we support them in two different ways. We’re preparing to launch a product in our Venus brand that will donate a percentage of our sales to them.”

Heraeus continues to develop new aesthetically pleasing yet reliable products for today’s market and maintains its aggressive research to generate tomorrow’s innovations, all the while keeping in mind its self-imposed and noble duty to transform the lives of patients, dentists and the community for the better.

(Portions of this article were taken from interviews conducted by Thomas Giacobbi, DDS, FAGD, Editorial Director)