

# Committed to patient safety

In the last 20 years, Ruetschi Technology AG has grown from a turning shop into an international company specializing in medical technology, specifically in single-use medical instruments, which are packaged in sterile kits and ready to use, and in implants for spinal and dental medicine. Not only has the company changed, but the Chairman of the Board and Co-CEO Christoph Ruetschi himself has done so too; and these changes have been key to the company's success.

Text: Anja Kutter

“There is still a lot to be done in the field of medical instruments,” says Christoph Ruetschi. “Recycling and sterilizing instruments are costly and often sub-standard. Currently, more than 90,000 people die every year across Europe as a result of hospital infections.” This is why the Co-CEO of Ruetschi Technology AG focuses on single-use instruments. These are packed in sterile kits together with the relevant implants. These “procedure kits” reduce both operation times and the risk of post-operative wound infections. Ruetschi Technology AG's area of expertise is spinal and dental surgery. Christoph Ruetschi can often be found in operating theaters, looking to find out what products could make doctors' jobs easier. “My passion is designing things that can help improve a person's quality of life. If our family business had not been there, I would probably have become a surgeon.” His commitment is paying off: Ruetschi Technology AG currently employs more than 200 people, enjoys interna-

tional success, and operates in three different locations; in Muntelier and Yverdon-les-Bains in Switzerland and in the German town of Renquishausen. Thanks to its innovative products and high precision, the company has become a big player in the development and manufacture of high-tech products in dental and orthopedic technology.

## **A young man at the helm**

“This wasn't always the case,” explains Christoph Ruetschi, looking back on the early days of the company. His father, Charles Ruetschi, founded the company in 1960 in La Chaux-de-Fonds, the heart of the Swiss watchmaking industry. The company then produced welding machines for manufacturing watches, and later the dial pins and turning parts were added. A new building in Yverdon-les-Bains would deal with the high demand. Ruetschi Technology AG first began to manufacture parts for the



Co-CEO Christoph Ruetschi. Christian Moser is the other man in charge.

medical technology sector in the mid-1980s. Everything was running smoothly up until the patron suddenly developed Alzheimer's. In a very short time he was no longer able to run the company. His wife had to step in and Christoph Ruetschi had to decide whether he wanted to take over the company. "I was 26, an engineer, and playing in the Swiss NLB volleyball league. Actually, I just wanted to enjoy life for a little while longer," he recalls. But it didn't pan out like that. He quickly packed his bags and traveled to the US to complete a two-year business studies course in Boston before taking over the business.

### **From contract manufacturer to developer**

From the get-go Christoph Ruetschi realized that his company needed to branch out. "We were manufacturing on a job-by-job basis. Someone gave us the drawing of a part, we produced it, job done." That went well for a while, but then the industry margins collapsed. There was only one thing that could save us from going under: a complete reorientation. "At that time, we decided to focus solely on medical technology. We also decided to start developing products – and this was the biggest milestone in our history." With only around 60 employees at the time, it was a big challenge for the company, but the paradigm shift paid off and marked the start of a positive period in the company's history. Additional impetus gave way to another decision: "Up until that point we had mastered working with metallic components and could produce spinal and dental implants, for example. However, for the instruments needed to insert implants of this kind during an operation, plastic parts needed to be produced as well. We decided to specialize in this area too, and in 2006 we took over André Gueissaz SA, an injection molding plant." Shortly after, Ruetschi Technology AG became a

holistic manufacturer of medical devices – a novelty in the industry. "The response to this was correspondingly positive, and the business performed just as well," recalls Ruetschi.

### **Personal overhaul**

The path to today's model company was not always smooth, however, and required a great deal of endurance. For example, in the years following the economic crisis of 2009, Ruetschi Technology AG lost its two largest clients. "Suddenly we couldn't invest anymore," explains Ruetschi. He also started to suffer from physical and emotional exhaustion. The symptoms crept up on him and suddenly it was all too much. The diagnosis of burnout came just in time to prevent collapse. "I realized I had to change something at a fundamental level. Not only in the company, but also in myself," says Christoph Ruetschi. What was it that finally brought Ruetschi Technology AG and the owner himself back from the brink? Ruetschi laughs: "A stroke of luck – and change at all levels. This started with acknowledging that I can't do it all alone." Ruetschi's first step was to bring in more management. His brother-in-law, Christian Moser, returned to the company and has since shared the CEO role with him. The board of directors and the shareholder structure were also expanded to bring new momentum to the company. "After we made these changes, we were so well organized that we were actually able to weather the Swiss currency crisis of 2015 surprisingly well. Since 2013, we have been growing at double-digit rates year after year."

### **Partners in good times and in bad**

Christoph Ruetschi's biggest concern at the moment is how to handle the large amount of orders and projects. "Right now, we are happy to have a partner like Credit Suisse. The

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In the cleanrooms of Ruetschi Technology AG, the surgical instruments and implants are packaged in “procedure kits,” which are then sterilized.

bank has experienced the whole transformation with us, has believed in us even when times were not as good, and is to this day by our side, at a time when growth needs to be financed,” says Christoph Ruetschi. Partners like that are essential to a company’s success. This he has learned over the past 17 years. And something else: “For a company to be able to make a real change, it requires not only development in technology, but also development in people themselves.”

#### **An innovative employer**

Christoph Ruetschi’s goal with Ruetschi Technology AG is to continue to grow and become the market leader in the field of procedure kits for spinal and dental medicine. Ruetschi does not believe that the topical subject of climate protection will reduce the success of the single-use medical instruments contained in the kits. “The energy balance of single-use instruments is actually better than that of conventional products. Furthermore, the amount of plastic being used is very small, and it is something that can significantly increase patient safety.”

As important as product development is to the CEO, so too is the internal development of the company. Management recently launched the “Employer of choice” initiative.

This is about helping Ruetschi Technology AG become a top employer. “We firmly believe that the success of a company starts and ends with its employees. Therefore, we are working hard to figure out what we can do to ensure that experts come to us and stay with us.” Ruetschi is open to new ideas in achieving this. “Not only in terms of products, but also in terms of processes, methods, and how we communicate with one another.”

## **Ruetschi Technology AG**

The company develops and produces high-tech products for the medical industry. Their specialty is the combining of metal and plastic components in the best way possible, making them a leading manufacturer of sterile single-use products for spinal surgery and dental implantology. Based in Muntelier, Canton of Fribourg, the Swiss company operates a second location in Yverdon-les-Bains, Canton of Vaud, and a third in Renquishausen, Germany. It is managed jointly by Christoph Ruetschi and Christian Moser and employs around 200 people. [ruetschi.com](https://www.ruetschi.com)