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INTERVIEW

SONY, the “wow” effect: interview with Martin Lage

Sony is one of the very few companies that everyone has an experience with. Almost everyone has a Sony product or a product including Sony components. As a leading company, Sony has brought a tremendous number of innovations to the consumer electronic market (and the professional market as well). Manufacturing only best-in-class products as a strategy is perfectly in line with Sony’s legacy as a premium brand. With ongoing very positive sales and profit development in FY2017 in Consumer Electronics area, the least we can say is that the strategy is working. Martin Lage, Country Head for Sony Switzerland & Austria kindly answered our questions.

1. Could you please introduce your professional background?

I joined Sony more than 20 years ago and spent half of my time in the area of operations and supply chain and half in Sales and Marketing which has given me a great overall insight into the company. In the beginning I focused on the development of Eastern European and Central Asia countries and was subsequently responsible for the Swiss and later also the Austrian business operation. Since 2012 I have been Country Head for the Consumer Electronics business in



Martin Lage, Country Head for Sony Switzerland and Austria

Switzerland and Austria, in concrete for the segments TV, Audio and Photo.

2. What is the function of the office in Zurich?

As you know, we are a leading manufacturer in the area of for instance audio, video, digital imaging, or games, but we also cover the entertainment side with Sony Pictures and Sony Music. This makes us really uniquely positioned in the world of entertainment. Our office here in Switzerland is a subsidiary of Sony Europe Limited, based in the UK. We focus specifically on Consumer Electronics, namely TV, video, audio and digital imaging – the camera and camcorder business. However, here in

Zurich we have a so called Sony united office, meaning that we share the same office with our colleagues from Sony Mobile Communications, Sony Playstation and Sony Professional Solutions. They are not directly under my supervision, but it is a great opportunity to leverage know-how and develop ideas. Ultimately our task it to implement the European sales- and marketing strategy in line with the corporate direction and assure to generate profitable growth and increase our brand value in this region.

3. Please, describe Sony’s business portfolio in Europe, especially in Switzerland. What have been the trends and sales over the last fiscal year?

There are three pillars we base all of our product developments/innovation on: Firstly, we are a truly premium driven company, so it’s all about developing premium products, paying great attention to the quality of everything - materials, technologies, design - to really generate a “WOW”-Effect for our consumers. Secondly, we focus very much on growing segments. In a consolidated point of view the growth potential of the Swiss CE market is limited, but there are sub-segments that are still growing. The recipe for success is to

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be there in time with new products for those growing segments and to be ahead of the game. The third pillar are the consumer needs, which we are paying a lot of attention to in order to answer their demand, but also aim to surprise them with new and innovative products, generating new markets. Back to the portfolio, TV is and has always been a major category for us. We are often asked, if it is still a profitable segment, which we can definitely answer with yes. For Sony, it is profitable exactly because of those three pillars. In TV there are currently three technologies that you must have heard about: 4K, HDR and OLED. For LCD TV we are focusing on the first two. Regarding OLED TV, we introduced our first BRAVIA OLED - the AI series - this year, which follows Sony's approach to enter the market with products that incorporate best possible technology. According to the amazing reviews of our OLED TV, it seems that we have been able to deliver this added-value in terms of picture quality and a truly innovative and Sony unique sound concept called “Acoustic Surface” which utilizes the whole panel as a speaker. And we of course always tend to catch the latest trend of how people like to design their living-room by offering a new and stylish design.

In the audio segment our focus is on growing segments like wireless speakers and wireless headphones. Sony is Nr. 1 in the consolidated headphone market in Europe. With the “1000X family” we just recently introduced a new range of wireless Noise cancelling headphones in



The Sony Bravia AI: Oled, 4K and HDR
The best television yet according to many independent reviews

this important segment at this year's IFA . For instance the new WF-1000X which is the smallest wireless in-ear headphone with noise-cancelling available on the market. These are absolutely great products for frequent flyers. Other important products in the audio segment are for example sound bars and high powered audio systems, so called party boxes, focusing on young people who like deep sound with EXTRA BASS and flashing lights. Here Sony has even created the market and is No. 1 in Europe.

Another very important field for Sony is the photo segment. Our great efforts in this area have fortunately been recognized at this year's EISA Awards, where we in total received six awards, five of them for digital imaging products. This is a historical record that we are particularly proud of, especially considering the reputation and professionalism of the EISA board. In the photo segment, Sony also strongly focused on semi-professional users in the recent years, especially with the Alpha 7 series. And with the new

Alpha 9 and an extended range of high-quality lenses we are clearly entering the professional market this year. Today, also with the premium compact RX100 series, we truly offer products for every use and every user. On top of that, as perhaps known, Sony is Nr. 1 in the image sensor market, so even in many non-Sony products you will find our sensors. Also here our decades-long legacy helped us to develop state-of-the-art image sensors.

4. How does Sony see the future of consumer electronics regarding new technologies?

Sony has been active for many years in the field of autonomous robotics, like with the aibo back in 1999. And just recently the Sony Corporation announced new initiatives in AI and Robotics by revealing a new aibo entertainment robot. And there are also other areas where we continue intensive research to develop new innovative products. Under the title “Live Space UX” some of them are al-

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ready available in selected markets, like for example a short-range 4K beamer, which is built into nice furniture that totally hides the technology when you are not using it. Or the LED bulb speaker, which is a 360° Bluetooth speaker that lights up like a candle. So the best in-class AV technology moves into the direction of style and living.

With the Seed Acceleration Program, established in 2014, Sony is for instance investigating into other potentials areas/markets by tracking promising new business ideas proposed by Sony employees into full-fledged businesses, like for example the Wena watch or MESH, small block shaped electronic tags that can be put together - very intuitive and great to stimulate kids' imaginations. Some of those products are going to be mass-produced and some others are going to be necessary steps to other future products.

5. How does Sony differentiate its products from those of other competitors?

As I said before, Sony has decades-long experience and an immense technological knowhow in all different product areas. As a clear premium brand we aim to offer our customers best possible quality by using cutting-edge technologies invented by Sony. And while some competitors go for volume, we go for quality

In this respect I already highlighted the Bravia OLED A1 TV, which is really a unique product. Let me explain why it is different from other OLED TVs. Apart from the used panel, which is just one single

component of the TV, there are other important and Sony unique technologies which make a big difference, like the X1 Extreme 4K processor to ensure the best possible picture quality in terms of contrast, brightness and color. The BRAVIA OLED A1 received top reviews from many independent magazines and testers which proofs that we are on the right track.

6. How do you define the importance of the Swiss market?

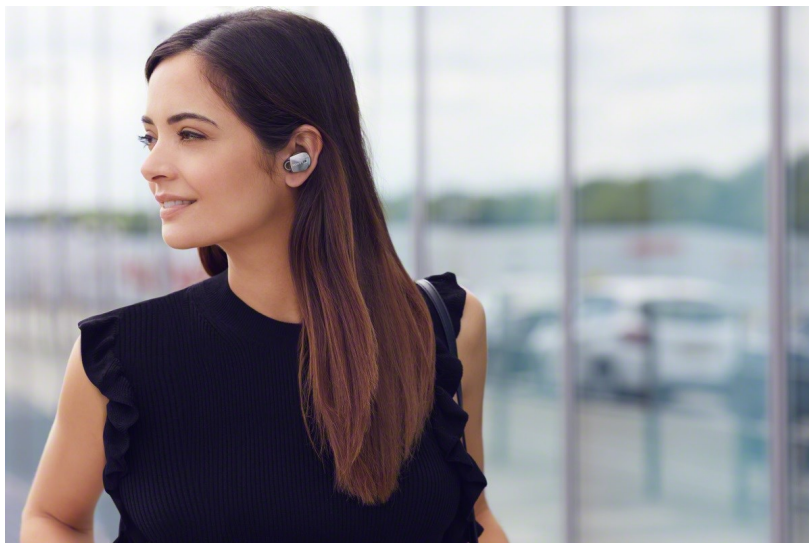
There are some particularities regarding the Swiss market; let me highlight a few. Swiss are very quality-conscious consumers and also curious about new technologies, which they are usually quite early ready to adopt. This and the fact that the purchasing power is higher than in other European countries makes the Swiss market is very interesting for Sony, especially for premium products like OLED or LCD TV, wireless noise-cancelling headphones or cameras.

7. Sony is one of the only companies creating both contents and the device to play them. How can customers benefit from it?

One key term in this respect is the so called “technology transfer”. Thanks to great experience - not only in hardware, but also in content creation - the Sony CE business benefits a lot. For instance Sony's knowledge from the professional market like the movie division allows us to catch the most recent trends and apply them to consumer electronics products like Sony TVs or smartphones. This also applies for our audio products where for example our consumer headphones can technologically benefit from professional experience gained at Sony Music studios. Last but not least, when you enjoy a picture or a movie with a Sony blu-ray disc on a Sony 4K HDR blu-ray player and a Sony BRAVIA 4K OLED TV, you will have the kind of end-to-end scenario that offers the best possible quality available.

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The Sony WF-1000X: Ultra-portable noise-cancelling bluetooth earphones

革新

INNOVATION

AIBO is back!

As the results of the current fiscal year could be historically high, Sony looks for the future and shows its knowledge in the field of robotics and IA, releasing the new generation of AIBO, the robotic pet. AIBO (for Artificial Intelligence Robot) was sold between 1999 and 2006. It was at the time the most advanced robot available for consumers. Among the hundreds of thousands of AIBOs sold, many of them have been used for education and research since the AIBO was much more affordable (and often more efficient) than research designed robots. After an eleven-year absence, this new generation comes with many improvements. The movements are confusingly natural

and the AIBO is more expressive than ever. The improved AI allows the AIBO to create a true unique bond with its owner since the ro-

bot learns and adapts using Sony's advanced deep learning technology.



Sony's AIBO

Source: Sony // More details at: <http://aibo.sony.jp/en/>

Agenda

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- ✓ Impulse Event: Japan
Event co-organized by JETRO, S-GE and the Swiss Japanese Chamber of Commerce (SJCC)
Zurich February 27, 2018

JETRO is a government-related organization that works to promote mutual trade and investment between Japan and the rest of the world. Originally established in 1958 to promote Japanese exports abroad, JETRO's core focus in the 21st century has shifted toward promoting foreign direct investment into Japan and helping small to medium size Japanese firms maximize their global export potential.

*The JETRO Switzerland Newsletter can also be viewed and/or downloaded online:
<http://www.jetro.go.jp/switzerland/newsletter>*

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