

Interview: Tomasz Mrzygłód - Managing Director, Olympus Poland



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Olympus is internationally well-regarded as being a quality camera provider and continues to provide developed countries across the globe with high-tech medical devices from endoscopes to imagery solutions. Tomasz Mrzygłód, managing director of Olympus Poland, sheds light on the company's long-term vision and how it manifests in Polish work practices, the exciting new portfolio coming to Poland as part of their 20th year of operations in the region, and how people are always at the core of the success of any business.

Would you be able to introduce yourself and the Olympus operations in Poland to our international readers?

I've been in the medical technology industry for 20 years having started out in J&J in the sales team. I quickly realized my interest in the medical sector, and it gives me great pleasure to work in the industry. I endeavour to stay in the medical sector for the rest of my career: it provides a fantastic opportunity to improve peoples' lives and to provide assistance whether that be for patients or doctors. Furthermore, it gives me great satisfaction to work in Poland—a rapidly developing country and economy—that has excellent potential. I see my role as bringing innovation to the market through a variety of functions, from minimal invasive therapies to innovative diagnostic solutions.

At Olympus Poland, we are excited to bring new products to market and see great potential for sustainable growth. This year marks the 20th year of operations in Poland, and next year marks the 100th anniversary of Olympus global. From a business perspective, we have seen brilliant growth year on year, and we outperformed our targets.

We operate in three domains: systems, life science and industrial solutions, camera and audio. Our primary growth driver is our medical technologies, in which we are global and Polish market leaders in gastroenterology. However, over the past two years, we have focused on surgical devices; indeed, this is a dominant priority and a crucial fast-growth area. We want to maintain our pole position in gastroenterology while enlarging our footprint in surgery.

What were your objectives when you took on the role two years ago?

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First and foremost, I wanted to focus on the people and the culture at Olympus; I expected to strengthen the organization by maintaining the high value and compliancy we benefit from at Olympus, and in the same breath, motivate and incentivize employees to reach even higher targets and exceed their potential.

The people's success at the company is a fundamental long-term objective. Despite excellent functioning in recent years, I believe we can reach higher levels of skills, competencies and swifter execution in business practices.

The team and their results make me proud given the long-term process and the satisfaction I gain from seeing significant progress, although market share is evidently essential. I like to empower, train and develop the team in a long-term perspective as opposed to focusing on quick short-term gains. The market is so rapidly changing and at times, volatile, so having the strength in depth and the support of an adept, fast and agile team is an excellent remedy and way of navigating the market.

What is the strategic importance of Olympus Poland to the global operations?

Olympus global regards Poland as a dynamic and developing country with extraordinary potential. Of course, we are aware of the size of the CIS region's powerhouses in Russia, China, and Turkey, but we are a rapidly growing market that enjoys high investment in new technology, facilities, and hospitals. We are an essential facet of the EMEA operation as most importantly; our growth is stable and sustainable. Fortunately, the market here lends to sustainable growth with low volatility despite the unpredictable nature of an emerging market.

Where else do you see challenges in the Polish market?

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I am optimistic by nature and therefore see opportunities in the Polish market to develop, evolve and adapt; I seldom see the market intricacies as barriers to growth. For me, they are sources of discovering innovative techniques and solutions. Spending on healthcare will grow over the years and coupled with that we observe positive GDP growth and strong parliamentary decisions. There is much opportunity here in Poland and with Olympus we intend to capitalise on it.

What new products are Olympus excited to bring to market?

Along with our imaging solutions, including 4k technology and 3D screening, we will integrate our IT solutions into hospitals. These solutions include organising documentation with advanced systems, video streaming, and steering of medical devices. We are excited to see more and more hospitals coming together and embracing 21st-century solutions which lead to better patient outcomes. Poland is one of the most successful countries that will benefit from new advancements in the medical tech field: given the highly educated workforce and the rollout of more and more hospitals, Poland is well prepared for our IT solutions.

Our new direction is in medical device tracking, a highly sophisticated and time-saving solution to everyday problems we encounter in the operating room. With our technology, you can pinpoint exactly where a device is, last usage, the medical professional who last engaged with it, the most recent disinfecting procedure and the capacity of the tool. Evidently, these technologies provide more safety and efficiency and assert a higher level of accuracy in complex surgical procedures.

Regarding educating healthcare professional on the use of our products, we have a huge responsibility as a manufacturer and retailer of medical devices. We never allow healthcare professionals to use our products without proper preparation, presentation, and explanation from our representatives. At Olympus Poland, we organize dry workshops and conferences to educate the healthcare community and always spend the necessary time especially during first procedures. We provide complicated solutions that require service from the point of sale to treatment, and we want to minimize any potential risk.

What is it that makes working at Olympus special for you?

Being a Japanese company, working at Olympus presents a huge and exciting cultural learning experience, and so far the journey has delivered: I have found the past two years interesting and exciting. Olympus is a long-term oriented company, and as a result, we do not change our

investments or focus from one day to the next. For me, the unique touch special to Olympus is our approach towards our people; we treat employees here similarly to how the Japanese culture does; I hesitate to use the word 'family'—but we strive to put employees' needs first and to consider their careers on a long-term basis. This long-term, 20-year approach to employees' careers is sometimes surprising to other employees, but personally, I value the style.

This ethos works. The average length of stay at the company is a long time—over ten years, and we have a high number of staff who stay with us until retirement. We treat people with respect; employees can influence the work they do and feel empowered. Also, we build lots of benefits to working at Olympus which extend to more than just financials.

When conducting interviews with prospective employees, I often say that rather than taking any job within the company, try to see the company as a journey and align the company's values with your values to see the long-term view of where you could position yourself in the company. If you want to proliferate and change jobs every year, I don't think Olympus is the culture for you; we want people who have shared values, and to work within a team where cooperation is essential. We are less interested in the 'star' players that want to go it alone, so we are thorough in checking team, empathy, and cooperative skills during interview processes.

How has the Olympus' culture influenced your leadership style?

I have benefited from several varied bosses across my career in medical technologies, from military-style bosses to extremely flexible, hands-off leaders. I like to pick the best of these experiences and combine my skills with the Olympus culture founded on long-term loyalty and care. The leaders we have in Hamburg and Tokyo are incredibly trusting and down-to-earth in their approach. Even if you sit down to lunch with the President, there is no hierarchical air or need to discuss KPIs, statistics and business models. Instead, we enjoy a feeling of readiness to support one another. Indeed, with proper trust, we can fulfil what is expected of us.

I experienced this open approach towards the beginning of last year. Unfortunately, progress in the first quarter was slow and we needed reform to overcome the challenges we saw. I was grateful that Olympus senior management was not panicked by the sight of three poor months' performance because they trust my leadership and operate a long-term vision. This approach improves our credibility, creates a functional system and perpetuates good work practice.

What fundamental techniques do you employ when navigating the Polish market?

Considering my experience, I find the critical steps are to keep a level-head and listen to those around you as much as the marketplace. I like to take this approach a step further and empathize with the team I have and to engage with the understanding of a problem or situation to the full. I want to be flexible for changes and treat all change as an opportunity. That is why we recommend that people from more advanced markets approach us.

The goal is to maintain and nurture growth, adhere to compliance and keep the team around me highly motivated. What is reassuring about Olympus is that with such high products available, we know that almost everyone wants them; it is therefore our job to communicate the message and establish the brand.

Even with the most advanced CRM systems, the best processes, and fantastic training, the company will not survive on the Polish market; but by adapting fast in a long-term projection, sustainable growth is an attainable goal.

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