

Interview: Alex Wang Yimin CEO, SONTU Medical Imaging, China



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Alex Wang Yimin, founder and CEO of SONTU Medical Imaging, shares the exciting story of SONTU’s development since 2009, their significant investment into R&D and various international certifications like the CE Mark and TL listing, and his advice to future aspiring entrepreneurs within the medtech space.

Mr. Wang, could you please introduce SONTU Medical Imaging to our international audience?

Established in 2009, SONTU Medical Imaging is an authenticated national level high-tech enterprise specializing in the research and development, production, marketing and servicing of medical imaging and radiography equipment.

The idea to establish SONTU came from one of my old schoolmates, who were working in R&D in Digital Radiography (DR) detectors in Canada at that time. He initially wanted to commercialize the technology in the US but he saw the huge potential in the rapidly growing Chinese market, and so we decided to collaborate to establish a company here in Shenzhen to commercialize his technology. Since then, we have brought all the R&D back to Shenzhen. In 2013, my old classmate left to start his own business in Canada.

In fact, SONTU was not the first company I established in Shenzhen; I was also the founder and major shareholder of Biocare until 2002. I could be considered a veteran of the Shenzhen medical device industry: I have been working in the medical devices industry for nearly 30 years, I was a founding director of the Shenzhen Association for Medical Device (SAMD) and was also deputy director at the branch company of CMICS Medical from 1990 to 1997, before leaving to establish

Biocare in 1998. So I was well-positioned to establish SONTU with my years of experience.

Over the past nine years, SONTU has advanced significantly both in terms of our R&D and manufacturing capabilities. We invest over 10 percent every year into R&D, which is highly significant for a local Shenzhen company. We now rank as one of the top three manufacturers of DR systems in the country and was also ranked the main DR manufacturer in 2014. In addition, in 2015, we became the only Chinese enterprise to pass all the IHE (Integrating the Healthcare Enterprise) tests.

Today, I am very proud that SONTU has five branch companies, 33 representative offices, and a robust nationwide sales and service network across China. We remain committed to providing great value and the best customer experiences for medical professionals and patients.

[Featured_in]

Shenzhen is the medical devices hub of China and now there are over 400 medtech companies in China, many in the medical imaging field. What do you see as SONTU's competitive advantages?

The quality of our products are absolutely comparable to those of international brands. In addition, within China, we are targeting community, private and public hospitals, where there is a need for such products but foreign companies with imported goods may not be able to cater to because of the lower price ranges. Strategically defining our market is how we were able to become market leaders in the DR equipment segment in China.

For instance, in 2017, we won the Guizhou province government tender for DR equipment to supply over 300 units to provincial hospitals. This is a great achievement and reflects our ability to reach our target customers.

Our R&D investment is also significant and I think this is a large part of our success. We have nearly 1500 square meters of office and R&D space here in Shenzhen for our R&D team, and in March 2016, we also established our Guangzhou R&D Center. We are also one of the few Chinese enterprises in Shenzhen to have established a UL Witness Lab in DR manufacturing, representing an investment of nearly CNY 10 million. This will support the Testing Facilities for the CE mark as well as the Witness Testing Data Program for the UL mark. It also shows that we have the ability to self-produce and control the quality of our products.

Could you share more about your product portfolios?

We currently have two main product lines: our DR detector systems (including human and veterinary systems), and our dental imaging systems with the dental CT systems as our core products.



With SONTU Medical being a domestic market leader in DR systems, what are your plans to expand into international markets?

This is now a strategic priority for the company. We are currently applying for the CE mark as well as UL for both human and veterinary products, and expect to receive approval soon.

We hope to find strategic partners to help distribute our products in international markets. In some markets, depending on terms of scale and demand, we may also establish affiliates directly and base some production operations there, where necessary.

Naturally, for our products to succeed in the global industry, we need to ensure that our products are top quality, are competitive, and well-recognized. We have a good track record in this regard and "Made in Shenzhen" products are recognized within China as representing better quality and bringing value to healthcare professionals. We hope to take this brand and reputation to global markets.

Quality control and guarantee, as you highlighted, are very important, especially in medical products. How do you ensure product quality?

This is a major priority for us. We have over 100 employees in our production facility, most of them having graduated from medical universities, including some with mechanical engineering degrees. We also have 16 independent workrooms for each process and model.

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All our employees undergo professional training sessions. We also implement strict QC inspection processes for materials and before delivering our products. In addition, we maintain detailed production and inspection records.

We are committed to delivering products of the highest quality.

On a more personal note, you have successfully established and grown two medical devices companies. What advice do you have for the new generation of entrepreneurs?

My core philosophy is that we need to be pragmatic in life as in business. We need to do things that will bring results, not stick to an idea that does not work. Of course, sometimes you need to try new things and fail in order to understand what is pragmatic and achievable.

I have been fortunate in that I have a deep understanding of the industry, so it means that I can see more easily which paths would work and which would not, which allows us to avoid detours.

What I recommend to new entrepreneurs, especially if they are fresh graduates, is to work more to get more experiences and put in effort into understanding the industry before setting off on their own path. When I joined the medical device industry, I experienced all the different business departments, from production to sales to R&D to management. This gave me a great overview of the business and the industry at large, which later helped me in establishing and running my own company.

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