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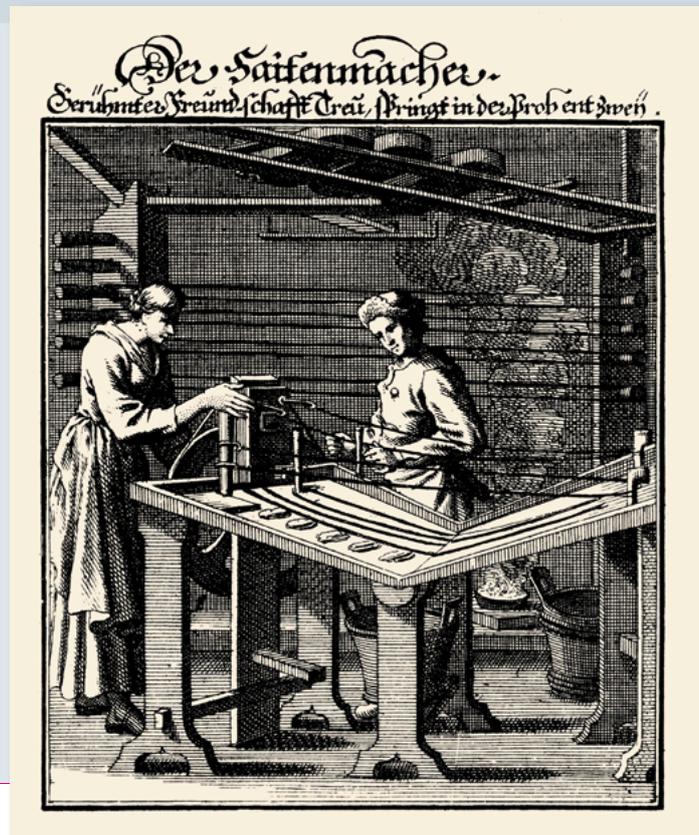
FROM GUT STRING
TO SURGICAL SUTURE
SERAG-WIESSNER SINCE 1866

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JAHRE
1866 - 2016



BEGINNINGS IN BERLIN

String makers (on the left) such as the Wiessner family in Wroclaw made strings from animal intestines. Historically, surgeons (on the right) were universal practitioners who treated all kinds of infirmities.



A GUT STRING FACTORY IN WEDDING

Serag-Wiessner's history begins in Berlin in 1866, when Carl Wiessner sets up his gut string factory in the Wedding district, surrounded by small workshops and aspiring businesses. He comes from a family with a long tradition of string making, where the craft with all its skills and know-how is handed down from one generation to the next. Elaborate procedures are involved in cleaning sheep's intestines before splitting, twisting and grinding them. Gut strings are used in musical instruments, as drive belts or in clock- and watchmaking. The medical sector starts to offer an additional field of application just at the point in time when Carl Wiessner founds his business. At that time the smooth threads from the gut string factory were ideal for closing wounds.

CATGUT FOR SURGICAL USE

Fine strings have been called "catgut" for a long time. It's not clear exactly where the name comes from. Cat intestines were certain-

ly never used, although claims are often made to the contrary. Instead, catgut is made from the intestines of sheep, goat or cattle. Surgeons start using catgut to close wounds in the early 19th century. But infections are still a frequent post-operation complication, for various reasons. This situation does not change until sterilisation is invented by Joseph Lister (1827–1912). He uses dressings soaked in phenol (carbolic acid) to disinfect and dress wounds; the first antiseptic operation (1866) is a milestone in the history of medicine. Suture material is now also sterilised, with catgut soon prevailing in this role.

Catgut made from hand-processed gut strings offers many advantages: it is smooth and strong while still being relatively elastic. The material is also absorbable, dissolving in the patient's body after a certain period of time. Surgeons recommend catgut at their congresses, and it is already being used as suture material in major hospitals such as the Charité in Berlin. String manufacturer Carl Wiessner is swift to see the chances offered by the medical sector.



WIESSNER - A BRAND NAME

During the second half of the 19th century, great progress is made in medicine in general and in surgery in particular. Surgeons start to perform successful procedures hitherto deemed inconceivable, such as surgery to remove tumours or operations on the heart. There is therefore a huge increase in the demand for medical instruments and materials. At the same time, doctors are working intensively at improving methods of sterilisation, with safe wound closure playing a key role in successful surgery.

Many hospitals meanwhile use raw catgut which they sterilise themselves. The suppliers include Carl Wiessner, whose products enjoy a good long-standing reputation. Scientists praise the special characteristics: Wiessner's catgut stands out by being "smooth, even and durable", according to medical literature. Dealers also start to show interest in catgut as surgical suture material. In the 1870s, Paul Hartmann's dressing material factory in Heidenheim starts to sell Wiessner's catgut

which soon becomes well known beyond Berlin itself. In just a few decades, the small string factory becomes one of Germany's leading catgut manufacturers.

Carl Wiessner puts his skills and his name to shaping the identity of a brand, but he has no successor for his gut string factory. In 1890, he sells the company to the businessman Heinrich Fürle, who decides to keep the established brand name Wiessner.

TWO ROOTS,
ONE COMPANY

Anhaltische Serum-Institut GmbH Dessau (ASID-Anhalt Serum Institute Dessau) (on the left and at the top) was a research and production centre. Catgut production (on the right) included manual procedures such as stretching the intestines.

A BACTERIOLOGICAL INSTITUTE IN DESSAU

After the First World War, animal diseases threaten the livestock together with the health and meat supplies for the German population. Research findings by Louis Pasteur (1822–1895), Robert Koch (1843–1910) and Emil Behring (1854–1917) meanwhile make it possible to isolate pathogens and produce vaccines. Great progress is made in controlling epidemic diseases such as rabies and anthrax together with communicable diseases such as cholera, diphtheria and tuberculosis. These advances are made in institutions pursuing veterinary research which also produce their own medication.

The bacteriological institute founded 1921 in Dessau in the Free State of Anhalt enjoys particular success. It has a special serum department that develops and produces vaccines, serum and medication. From 1930 onwards, the products are sold through a separate company called “Anhaltische Serum-Institut GmbH Dessau (ASID)” which is no longer part of the research institute.

PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY IN WARTIME

ASID soon becomes one of the big players on the pharmaceutical market thanks to its high scientific standards and good sales figures. In 1936 ASID purchases Saecama (Sächsische Catgutmanufaktur – Saxon catgut manufacturer) and starts to make surgical sutures. The company expands its activities covering all aspects of medical products and it is soon a highly desirable prospect. The National Socialists take control of the ASID which is linked to the state bacteriological institute, and found the ASID-Werkgemeinschaft (Factory Community) based in Berlin. Branches are also set up in the areas occupied by the German army since the start of the war in 1939. The company with a workforce sometimes amounting to 3,000 employees becomes an important supplier for the military and civil sanitary and veterinary sectors. ASID also supplies the German army with surgical suture material and plays a fully integrated role in the wartime economy.



At the end of the Second World War in 1945, the ASID Group disintegrates and leading employees try their luck in West Germany. Reinhold Kretschmann, who runs the ASID company in Prague including a catgut factory, takes the existing stocks and inventories to set up business in Hof, Bavaria.

WIESSNER WITH CHANGING PROPRIETORS

Meanwhile, Carl Wiessner's gut string factory flourishes under the new proprietor Heinrich Fürle. From the early 1890s onwards, he focuses on surgical suture material, phasing out the production of musical strings. His son Max Fürle goes a step further and in 1900 is one of the first suppliers of sterile catgut. High standards of hygiene guarantee good suture material. The Wiessner brand stands for "highly meticulous cleaning and cleanness", with the authorities classifying the factory as exemplary.

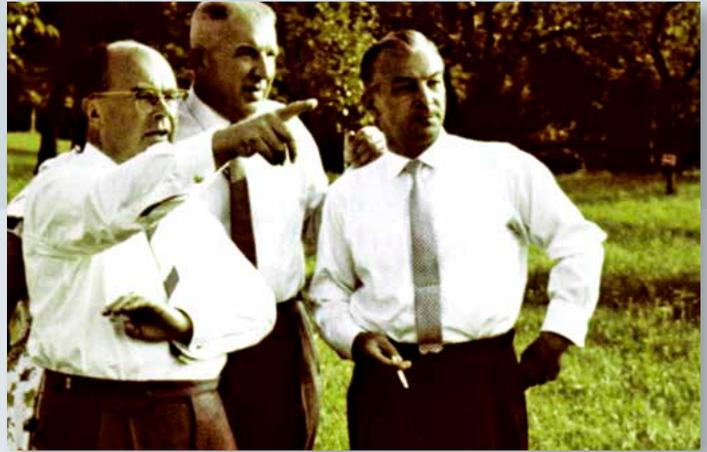
In 1936, the Wiessner factory in Berlin is taken over by Theodor Neumann, who worked previously as a sales representative for another

catgut manufacturer and now sets up his own business. After 1939 his catgut production is deemed to be essential to the war effort, making supplies among others to the ASID factories. With the war scenario jeopardising the situation in Berlin, in 1943 Neumann relocates his production activities to a temporary site near Bamberg, Bavaria.

ENCOUNTER IN FRANCONIA

From 1945 onwards, Reinhold Kretschmann, former ASID employer and Theodor Neumann, proprietor of the Wiessner factory, try to restore business for vaccines and catgut. In 1946, Kretschmann is co-founder of Serag GmbH (Süddeutsche Serum- und Arzneimittelwerk – South German Serum and Medicine Factory) in Haar near Munich. Neumann wants to start manufacturing catgut under the Wiessner brand in Franconia. Finally in the summer of 1949, they join forces and set up a new joint company.

NEW START AND PROGRESS



The company's new start in Franconia – initially in Culmitz and subsequently in Naila – was initiated by Theodor Neumann (at the top on the left) and from 1956 by Dr Friedrich Pfeiffer (at the top in the middle). The most important product was catgut in glass containers (on the right).

MODEST BEGINNINGS

Restarting the company after the war is an arduous task: the catgut factory run by Theodor Neumann and Reinhold Kretschmann has to cope with extremely confined production facilities in an old building in Culmitz, about five kilometres outside Naila. The equipment is simple, but the employees offer superb manual skills. The workforce consists primarily of string makers from Markneukirchen in Saxony who uphold the company's quality standards and its good reputation. The suture material is sold under the brand name of “Serag” in Southern Germany and as “Wiessner” in Northern Germany.

CHANCES AND UPHEAVALS

The prerequisites for the young catgut company with its long tradition look good. Buildings for the splitting sections and for the administration departments are constructed in the early 1950s on the Kugelfang industrial estate in Naila. But Neumann and Kretschmann get into financial difficulties and personal

conflicts. The situation deteriorates in 1951 when Kretschmann is imprisoned for black marketeering and Neumann increasingly withdraws money from the company. Facing indebtedness, the bank tries to find someone to rescue the company, which relocates to the premises in Naila with new buildings in 1956.

TURNAROUND WITH DR FRIEDRICH PFEIFFER

Dr Friedrich Pfeiffer (1906–1978) is a lawyer from Thuringia who previously ran a weaving mill in the state of Hesse. He becomes a stakeholder in the catgut factory in 1956, investing his money and business experience. He puts things straight and reorganises the company, cultivates contacts to doctors and hospitals and gets the firm back on the road to success.

In 1961 the Serag catgut factory merges with Carl Wiessner's catgut factory, which in fact now only exists on paper. A new company emerges under the name of “Serag-Wiessner” which combines the tradition and reputation of its predecessors. When Theodor Neumann



leaves the company in 1964, Dr Friedrich Pfeiffer becomes the sole Managing Director.

Besides its surgical suture material, from the 1960s onwards Serag-Wiessner sells infusion solutions which are also made in Naila. The committed sales force plays a very special role. Close relationships to doctors and nursing staff and a good knowledge of the requirements arising from hospital procedures form the basis on which Serag-Wiessner prevails with its products.

INNOVATIONS AND CHALLENGES

The market for suture material starts to change with the arrival of American manufacturers on the German market who begin to take over suture material companies. New products soon start to make their mark. These include synthetic threads which begin to replace catgut made from animal intestines, as well as sterile threads cut to size packed up in small quantities with disposable needles. With simple machinery, a wealth of know-how and great commitment, Dr Friedrich Pfeiffer manages

to survive in the face of competition from industrial-scale manufacturers. Serag-Wiessner remains independent and also starts to offer suture material in small packages. The long-standing customers in hospitals benefit from the innovation which permits simpler work-flows during surgical procedures.

Under Dr Friedrich Pfeiffer's leadership the company enjoys very positive development through to the 1970s, with further construction work, extensions and modernisation. Serag-Wiessner and its workforce of about 150 employees holds its ground on the market for infusion solutions and surgical suture material. Following the sudden death of Dr Friedrich Pfeiffer in 1978, his widow Ursula Pfeiffer takes up the challenge of continuing the company's successful path.

UNDER FEMALE LEADERSHIP



Ursula Pfeiffer led and represented the company from 1978 – at exhibition stands (with son Stefan on the left) and in the company.

NEW PROPRIETOR: URSULA PFEIFFER

Ursula Pfeiffer takes over the management of the company after the death of Dr Friedrich Pfeiffer. Up to this point in time, she acted behind the scenes at Serag-Wiessner, dealing with correspondence on account of her husband’s increasingly impaired vision, and travelling with him to Italy and Spain to purchase animal intestines. As a former nurse, she knows exactly what kind of expectations hospitals have when it comes to surgical suture material.

Great challenges await her as the head of Serag-Wiessner, but Ursula Pfeiffer is determined to keep the company in the family so that she can hand it over later on to her sons when they are old enough.

Some competitors underestimate the new proprietor, but she has a clear vision. Ursula Pfeiffer changes a number of suppliers and continues the structural extensions to the company’s premises, adding more space for production and for upgrading the computer systems: in the early 1980s, Serag-Wiessner

undertakes important steps to modernise the company. A skilled crafts company is finally transformed into an efficient industrial firm.

SYNTHETIC THREADS AND MINI-BOXES

With the help of good contacts in Japan, Serag-Wiessner develops synthetic threads to round off its range of products. Together with the traditional catgut and silk, linen or steel threads, customers are now also offered a range of synthetic suture materials. The Seralon and Serafit brands become swiftly established on the market and have been constantly improved ever since. Serag-Wiessner’s packaging for short threads, known as mini-boxes, are equally successful. This new development which Ursula Pfeiffer discovers and adopts in the early 1980s gives the company a good position among suture material manufacturers. Serag-Wiessner and its products keep pace with the major change which is taking place in operating theatres: threads from the bottle, which have to be cut to size individually, are finally replaced by short threads from practical small packages.



Infusion solutions comprise the company's second mainstay, and their significance for the range is reflected in the special building with clean rooms for sterile bottling that is constructed in the mid 1980s. The capital expenditure made here in this segment with its high requirements for hygiene and documentation puts Serag-Wiessner in good stead for the future.

PARTNER FOR THE MEDICAL SECTOR

Serag-Wiessner's success is based on personal contacts and close relationships. The suture material manufacturer has become far more than just a supplier: the company works together with doctors to develop the right material for new surgical procedures. One outstanding example in this respect consists in the minimally invasive methods used in laparoscopic surgery. Serag-Wiessner with its own research and development activities turns into a modern medical technology company. The firm has found its niche where it constantly expands its experience with materials and how to process them.

GROWTH PHASE

German reunification opens up a whole new market for Serag-Wiessner. A committed sales team presents the products made in Naila to the hospitals of Eastern Germany, where it is met with great interest. Sales also increase in Western Germany and in neighbouring European countries. Following years of product development and improvement, Serag-Wiessner is now well established with its suture material.

In 1991 the company celebrates its 125th anniversary. In a branch dominated by corporations and large manufacturers, Serag-Wiessner offers a special profile as a proprietor-run family business. After running the company for more than ten years, Ursula Pfeiffer hands responsibility over to her sons.

INNOVATIVE AND
CLOSE TO CUSTOMERS



Family company with modern production facilities and warehouses: Serag-Wiessner has cleanrooms covering more than 2,000 m² and a workforce of around 200 employees.

NEW GENERATION

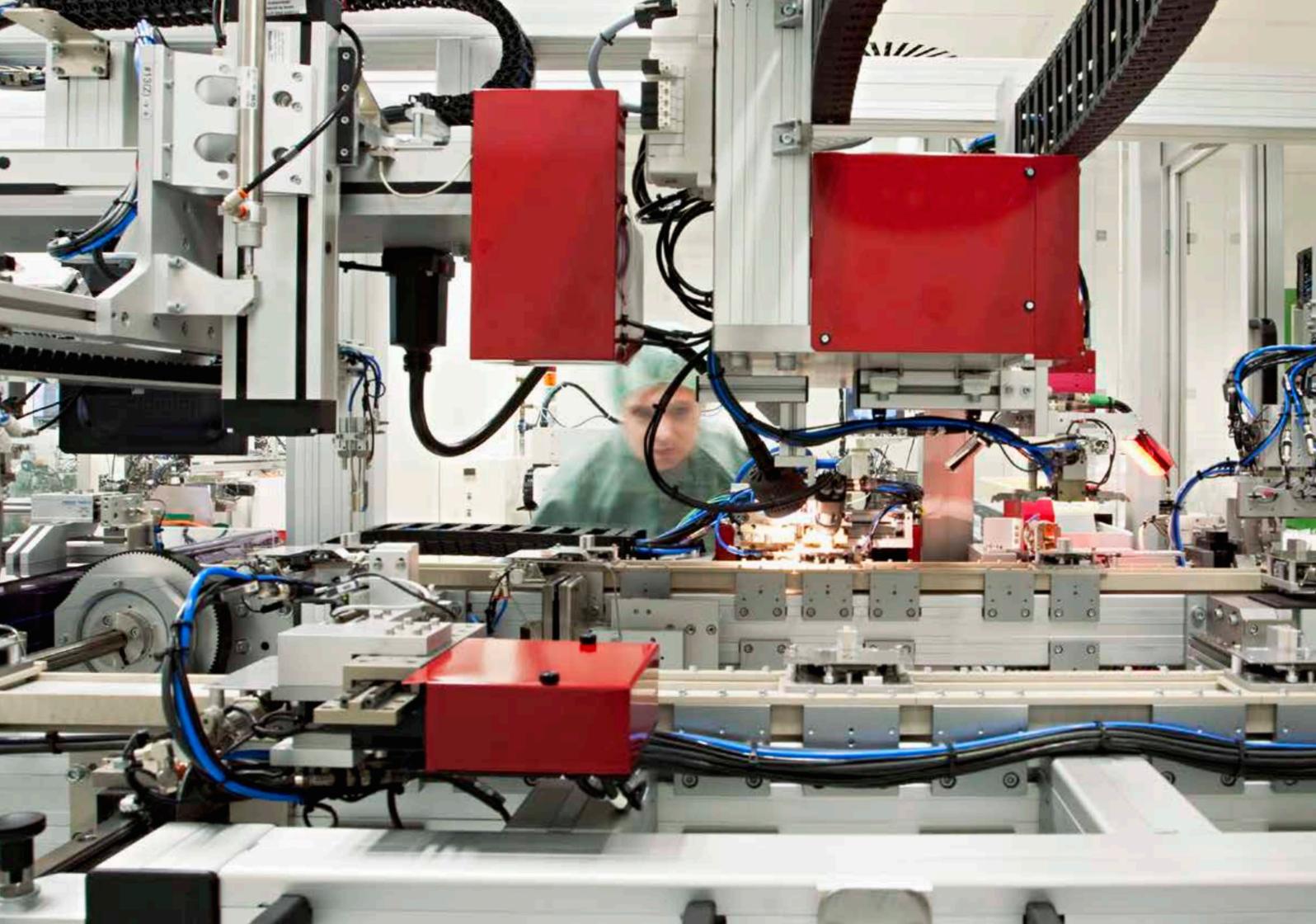
Stefan and Thomas Pfeiffer, the sons of Ursula Pfeiffer and her deceased husband Friedrich, gradually take over their share of the business in the early 1990s. After a few terms at law school, Thomas Pfeiffer eventually completes his degree in medicine, while Stefan Pfeiffer graduates from university with a business degree and as a fully qualified lawyer. Together the brothers continue the tradition of the family company. They face major tasks in view of the growing demands made of medication and medical devices.

In 1992, work begins on the construction of a production building which will allow the firm to expand and modernise its cleanroom production facilities. At the same time, the whole company and its organisational structures are thoroughly overhauled. Serag-Wiessner is in good shape, particularly for continuing its close cooperation with surgeons.

CHANGES AND NEW PRODUCTS

Catgut, the suture material that put the company on the road to success, is still widely used in the 1990s and particularly popular in gynaecology, despite all new developments with synthetic threads. But in 2000, the commotion surrounding the BSE epidemic brings things to a sudden end. Although the health risk is deemed to be improbable, suture material made of animal intestines is prohibited. Although Serag-Wiessner as a traditional manufacturer suffers a setback, the company swiftly adapts to the new situation. The product range is supplemented and customers change over to Serag-Wiessner's synthetic suture material. However, the suture business suffers increasingly from price wars initiated by the major manufacturers.

Serag-Wiessner's forte consists in working together closely with surgeons on new developments. A new niche is found in implants for uro-gynaecological procedures. Textile know-how, contacts and flexibility swiftly help Serag-Wiessner become well positioned on the market.



The suture material manufacturer puts its faith in supplementary services. Residency centres give doctors an opportunity to learn how to use the implants in everyday hospital routines, while workshops and events with medical experts provide information for a range of different disciplines.

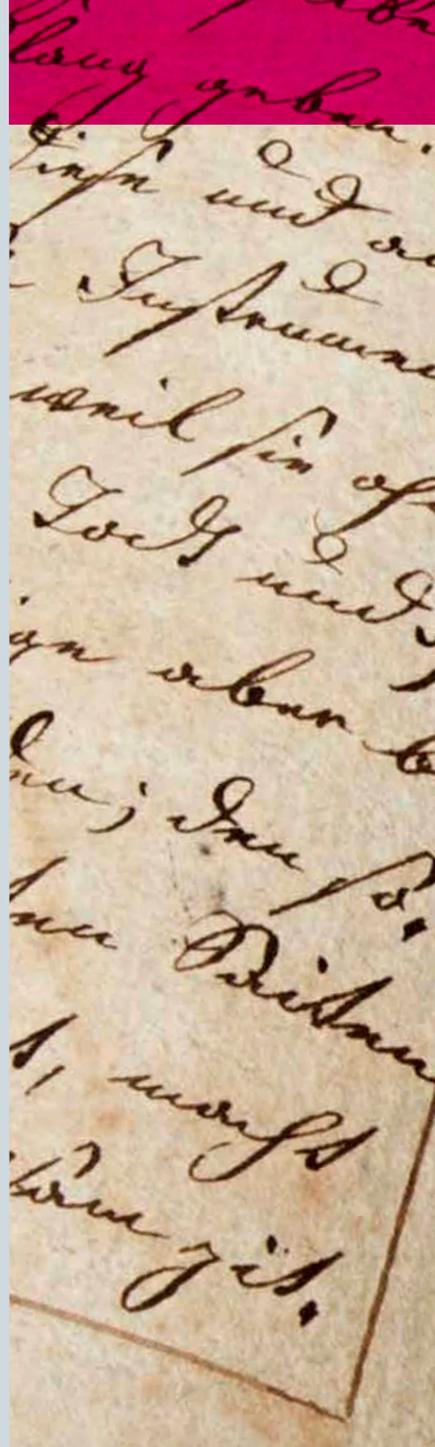
By offering a combination of innovative products and corresponding training courses, the small manufacturer is increasingly succeeding in setting itself apart from the competition. The approach is also successful in the field of wound treatment. New wound irrigation solutions supplement the Serag-Wiessner range of sterile solutions, with the company continuing to see its role as partner for the medical sector. For example, it works together with nursing and medical experts to organise symposiums on wound management.

VIALE AS A NICHE BUSINESS

Close personal contacts with surgeons, nurses and buyers are the key to the company's success. From sales rep visits to symposiums,

Serag-Wiessner uses every possible opportunity for continuous sharing. After all, it takes joint cooperation with customers and users to bring about good, marketable products. It is the company's innovative capabilities in constantly bringing this process to a successful conclusion that safeguard Serag-Wiessner's future. Interdisciplinary teams offer know-how in the fields of medicine, biology, pharmacy and chemistry combined with engineering experience, particularly in textile engineering.

A strong customer focus with a highly specialised approach – that's Serag-Wiessner's potential. In contrast to many large competitors, the company takes an individual approach to addressing customer requirements. Right through to the present day, products are manufactured as special custom-made designs or in mini-series. Serag-Wiessner is a business whose production is geared to the niches; in combination with individual consulting and support, this is where the Pfeiffers continue to see the company's main strengths for the future.



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